

NOTES ON  
THE CONSTITUTION

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REFORMED CHURCH  
IN AMERICA

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Notes on the Constitution of  
the Reformed Church in

Edward S. Worcester.

May, 1928.

N. H. S. D.









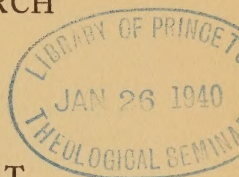
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OF THE REFORMED CHURCH  
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OF THE REFORMED CHURCH  
IN AMERICA

BY  
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PRESIDENT OF NEW BRUNSWICK SEMINARY



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## FOREWORD

**T**HE constitution of the Reformed Church in America, its law of organization and procedure, is of vital concern to all officers of the church and of important concern to the general membership of the church as well. The minister naturally is familiar with it and has it at hand for reference as occasion arises; it should be also in the hands of all elders and deacons; and circulation of it among the members of the church should be encouraged.

The meaning of its various provisions is in general clear, the application in any circumstance not perplexing. This is not invariably true, however. Some provisions need explanation. Here and there comment may have value in indicating the grounds upon which a provision is based, the reason for it, the importance of it. Some defining of situations which may arise calling for careful reference to the constitution may also be of service. Statement of particular decision by judicatory applying a provision or related to it will help intelligent understanding.

Any attempt to set forth the law of the church somewhat in this way is of necessity of limited scope. It is impossible to discuss or to be aware of all the questions which may arise. The manifold circumstance of church affairs calling variantly for decision by the constitution cannot be known, cannot be fully recited so far as known. More than this and emphatically the discussion, the expression of judgment, is personal; it is without church authority save at points where this authority has expressed itself and is specifically associated in the comment. Opinions of students may differ at points not a few, some of them of no small importance.

In many things dealt with the bearing of the civil statutes is decisively in point. Wherever this is, or may be, the case,

## FOREWORD

*legal advice should be sought and followed. In general the civil, judicial authority sustains church laws in the field of the church's jurisdiction. "It is quite clear that in matters of an ecclesiastical nature relating to the government and discipline of the church, the decision of the constituted authorities of the church is final and is binding in the civil tribunals of justice."* (McKinney's Consolidated Laws of New York. Annotated. Book 50. Religious Corporations Law.)

The words of the constitution as here printed follow the official printing in the minutes of the General Synod, 1916, in large use of capital letters, but this practice is not followed in the notes attaching. It will be observed also that the historical prefatory note and the few words of introduction belong with the constitution, being recited with the body of articles in the adopting and declarative act of the General Synod.

The notes now prepared and printed for the use of the students in the New Brunswick Theological Seminary and, so far as desired, for the use of ministers and laymen throughout the church are in succession to the notes bearing the same title prepared and printed in 1896 by Dr. David D. Demarest, honored and beloved professor in the Seminary at that time.

W. H. S. DEMAREST

*The Tercentenary of the  
Reformed Church in America  
April, 1928*



## PREFATORY NOTE

The Reformed Church in America is derived from the Reformed Church of the Netherlands, which began its formal organization in 1566. In that year at a Synod held at Antwerp the Belgic Confession of Faith was adopted, and preliminary Rules of Church Government were formulated. The Rules were revised in successive Synods, and at the Synod of Dort, 1619, they received a form which lasted in Holland for nearly two centuries. At a Synod held at Wesel in 1568 the Netherlands Liturgy was adopted. At a Synod held at Embden in 1571 the Heidelberg Catechism was adopted as a symbol of evangelical faith. A Compendium of the Heidelberg Catechism was made in 1608. Certain points of doctrine received further and extended statement at the Synod of Dort, 1619, forming the Canons of the Synod of Dort.

The Reformed Church in America retained these several symbols of doctrine, the Belgic Confession, the Heidelberg Catechism with its Compendium, and the Canons of the Synod of Dort, and still holds them as its Standards.

It retained also the Netherlands Liturgy with virtually no change until about 1840; since then a few changes have been made by omissions or substitutions and some new forms have been adopted from time to time. The Rules of Church Government of 1619 were freely translated into English in 1792, and Explanatory Articles were added to them, adapting them to American conditions. The Polity of the Church remained in this form until 1833 when the Rules and the Explanatory Articles with amendments were fused into a single body of Articles, which then become the Constitution of the Church. Further amendments were made at various times and in 1874 a general revision was made. A new general revision was begun in 1910, and completed in 1916.

In 1819 the church was incorporated as "The Reformed Protestant Dutch Church." The title was changed by act of the General Synod in 1867, and by act of the Legislature of New York in 1869 to "THE REFORMED CHURCH IN AMERICA."

## INTRODUCTION

It is necessary that there should be certain offices and assemblies and a strict attention to doctrines, sacraments, usages and Christian discipline for the maintenance of good order in the Church of Christ; of all these the following ecclesiastical ordinances particularly treat.



THE CONSTITUTION  
OF THE  
REFORMED CHURCH IN AMERICA

ARTICLE I

OF THE STANDARDS AND OFFICES

SECTION 1. The name of this Church is The Reformed Church in America.

In America in the early days the churches remained a part of the Reformed Church in the Netherlands and were known as the Reformed Dutch Churches in New York and New Jersey. They had no self-government save that of the local church for one hundred years and little of it for nearly fifty years more. The first fixed form of independent organizing was the Plan of Union offered by the Reverend John H. Livingston on his return from the Netherlands in 1770, approved by a Convention of the churches in America in 1771, approved by the Classis of Amsterdam the next year and in that year, 1772, finally subscribed as the foundation articles of a virtually self-governing group of churches, the Reformed Dutch Churches in North America. With the articles of 1792 the unified title appears, the Reformed Dutch Church in the United States of America. The church had become wholly separate from the Reformed Church in the Netherlands. Incorporated in 1819 under the title, The Reformed Protestant Dutch Church, and changed in name, 1867-1869, to The Reformed Church in America, the church maintains in parenthesis if it wishes to do so the word, Dutch, so generally used and so much valued. At the time, however, the word was regarded as not favor-

able to a general knowledge of the church as fully American, was regarded as not favorable to the church's general growth.

The name has some valuable distinction. "Reformed," expressing the whole genius of the Reformation, appears preferable to distinctive titles used by some other leading denominations, a title representing the form of government in point or a title representing the individual leader to whom a body traces its origin. "In America" defines the separateness from the Church in the Netherlands, proposes wide field of service on this continent, and distinguishes the corporate life from that of the Reformed (German) Church in the United States.

The corporate name of the denomination as above does not, it will be understood, lay obligation for specific title upon a local church corporation. The corporate name of a local church, whatever it was before the change of name of the denomination in 1867, may remain unimpaired. A new church may be organized under any corporate name it chooses, approved by the civil authority, it being assumed that it would be sufficiently consistent with the denominational name.

Sections 1, 2, 3, and 4 were first introduced into the constitution by the revision of 1916.

2. The Scriptures of the Old and the New Testaments are its only rule of faith and practice.

The Scriptures are given an exclusive place, a place not accorded the standards of the church. They are the only rule of faith and practice; the concerted faith of the church is to be tested by the Scriptures; the life and conduct as well as the faith of the member and of the church are to be tested by them. This place exclusive and of final authority is given to the Scriptures on the ground that they are or contain a unique revelation from God, are the voice of an inspiration surpassing the inspiration of God in any other literature. This does not preclude a recognition of the Old Testament and New Testament as in some sort a progressive revelation, of the varying value for faith and



for practice of different parts of the Book, or of the weightier address to all peoples and ages of the later Scriptures given in the fullness of time. The church recognizes that the Bible is never out of date or without universal aptness, that, while not a system of doctrine or a minutely detailed code of morals, it is the always imperative and adequate rule of faith and practice and as such must be the test of the church's systems of doctrine and codes of procedure.

It is plain also that, while the Scriptures are subject to the concerted interpretation of the church for the formulating of any systems of doctrine or rules of organization and life, this does not deny the right of individual interpretation for the defining of personal belief and conduct. This right is an outstanding principle of the Reformation; it characterized the Reformed Church at its origin in all lands. There is no *ex-cathedra* interpretation of the Scriptures binding upon the individual conscience. On the other hand also it is entirely competent for the church, any church, to express its interpretation in definite forms which quite in detail express the beliefs and allegiances of the individual who would be a member or an officer of it.

3. The Doctrinal Standards of the Church are the *Belgic Confession of Faith*, the *Heidelberg Catechism* with its *Compendium*, and the *Canons of the Synod of Dort*.

The doctrinal standards, not sharing the unique authority of the Scriptures, have their own place of church authority. The constitution here simply gives the names of them, states that the three symbols named are the doctrinal standards of the church. They are the church's concerted interpretation of the Scriptures, a formulating into systematic statement of the inspired teachings regarded as most important and as composing a comprehensive expression of the church's faith. Creeds arose early in the history of the Christian Church for the clear voicing of the Christian's belief and for the manifest uniting of confessors. To the creeds the Councils added their decrees. At the Reformation, in the churches of the Reformed faith, symbols quickly appeared, of great scope and somewhat varied substance, the

work of leaders singularly able and devoted, zealous champions of the Reformation movement. It was the genius of the age. Intended to express the true interpretation of the Scriptures, they were the characteristic documents of the several bodies into which the Reformation stream divided. They emphasized the divisions between these bodies as well as the dividing of them all from the Roman Church. Born in church conflict, most of them were in their intended statement of truth more controversial than would be documents born in different circumstance or in this modern age when the spirit of all churches is to emphasize the common Christianity rather than the incidental differences.

The Belgic Confession was written by Guido de Bres, a Belgian, in 1559. It was written in French and it is composed of thirty-seven articles, a comprehensive body of doctrine. It was adopted by the Church in the Netherlands at the Synod of Antwerp in 1566.

The Heidelberg Catechism was written by Casper Olevianus and Zacharias Ursinus in 1563. It was written in German under the patronage of Frederick, Elector of the Palatinate, champion of the Reformation. It was adopted by the Church in the Netherlands at the Synod of Wesel in 1568. The Compendium of it was prepared in 1608 by Hermannus Faukelius, theologian, minister of the church at Middleburg, Zeeland.

The Canons of the Synod of Dort were adopted by the Church in the Netherlands at the synod which convened at Dordrecht in 1618-19 and at which were present representatives from virtually every land where the Reformed Church had established its life. The Canons present certain doctrines of the church under five heads.

These doctrinal standards are the authoritative statement of the position in Christian belief of the Reformed Church in America, its interpretation of the Scriptures. While subject to human error, they were composed by men regarding themselves as guided by the Holy Spirit; they have the authority of constantly expressed approval by the church for three hundred or three hundred and fifty years; they

approve themselves in general to the Christian consciousness of the church today. They are great historic documents with claim for many reasons to remain unamended even if at a few points they do not express with verbal exactness the present-day thought of the church.

They have certain special excellence of their own in the group of Reformation symbols. The *Belgic Confession* is prevailingly gracious and irenic in tone rather than severe and controversial. The *Heidelberg Catechism* is distinctly experimental and practical, its quality well revealed in its first question and answer: "What is thy only comfort in life and death?" "That I belong unto my faithful Saviour, Jesus Christ." The *Canons of the Synod of Dort* are in part more severe and divisive, answering sharp challenge of the moment; but, while holding equal place with the *Confession* and the *Catechism* in the list of standards, they inevitably hold secondary place in the general thought of the church, owing to their less complete field of doctrine and their, in part, less happy language.

It is of importance in the procedure of the church that it does not ask of one who would become a member that he confess complete adherence to these standards, that he be a believer in all that the standards contain. Confessing the Lord Jesus Christ as Saviour and Lord and pledging the proper loyalties to His life and to the service of His church, he is received into the church; a general agreement and sympathy with the substance of the standards is usually ascertained or to be assumed. If later on there arise some disagreement and lack of sympathy with parts of the standards, change of church connection is not necessary if the faith in Christ and service of Him remain.

Question may arise whether the words, *Articles of our Faith*, as used in the form for the Lord's Supper, refer to the standards. It is fair to assume that they do not, that they refer to the *Apostles' Creed* which immediately precedes the words in the form. Question may also arise whether the slightly different words in the form for baptism, *Articles of the Christian Religion*, refer to the standards. While

the context does not make the matter clear, it is fair to assume that the meaning is the same as that of the words, Articles of our Faith, in the other form; it does not seem necessary to infer that the adult candidate for baptism and accompanying church membership is to be required to express belief in the full body of doctrine, the standards. This understanding is well sustained by the words of the office in the liturgy for the reception into full communion of those who have been baptized in infancy. The question asked by the minister, Do you believe? is related with verbal exactness to the Apostles' Creed, to "the truths affirmed in these Articles of the Christian faith as they are taught here in this church according to the Word of God."

4. The Forms of Ecclesiastical Procedure and Order of Worship in the Church are contained in its Liturgy.

Forms of worship and for official ceremonies came into use early in the life of the Christian Church and grew in scope and in wealth of detail as the years passed. At and after the Reformation much of this material passed into liturgies adopted by the Reformed Churches in their several national organizations. A Netherlands liturgy was adopted at the Synod of Wesel in 1568. From the Netherlands it came with the church to America. Amended in one part or another from time to time, it finally received a general revision by a committee whose chairman was the Reverend Edward B. Coe, D.D., following upon the work of a committee whose chairman was the Reverend Mancius H. Hut-ton, D.D. This revision was adopted by the General Synod in 1906 and is the liturgy now in use.

The scope of the church's liturgy, the emphasis placed upon it, and the requiring of its use in certain parts have given the Reformed Church in America status as a semi-liturgical church, that is, a church in so far occupying position between the liturgical churches such as the Protestant Episcopal and the virtually non-liturgical churches such as the Presbyterian. The position has much to commend it in its preserving of excellent forms and of general freedom of worship as well.



The liturgy contains an order of the Christian Year, order of Lord's Day worship, the creeds, general prayers and prayers for special occasions, forms for the administration of the sacraments, for the ordination and installation of ministers and elders and deacons, for the corner stone and the dedication of a church, for marriage, for the burial service.

While it is as a whole officially set forth by the constitution, it is not in all parts obligatory upon the church and its ministers. The constitution at particular points states certain requirements. The Lord's Day worship must consist with the given order. The form for baptism and the form for the Lord's Supper must be used when the sacraments are administered. The forms for ordination and installation must be used when officers are to be inducted. Forms of prayer outside these set services are for optional use; so the forms for marriage service and burial service. It is, however, very desirable and advisable that the optional forms belonging to and characteristic of the church be used by its ministers. They are dignified and excellent, and in their use the genius of the church is honored and its unity served. They may be developed and enriched, however. The form for the burial service is excellent and should be used; but it is too brief; the adding of other Scripture passages seems very desirable, as often also does a free prayer; the service thus meets occasion more adequately and acceptably. The form for marriage is admirable in its completeness as well as in all its phrasing.

Forms of certificate for various uses have found place in the practice of the church in the past, have been recognized with authority as appropriate and have been appended to the printed constitution; but they are not a part of the constitution; their exact words are not required. It may also be added that mandatory resolutions have sometimes been passed by the General Synod; they have much official weight; but they are not a part of the constitution. It would be of value and service to have such of these as are of continuing force and importance set forth, like the certificate forms, with the constitution. Many such reso-

lutions up to 1834 were assembled by a committee of which Dr. John Knox was chairman in a report to the General Synod that year.

5. The Offices in the Church are four:
  1. The Office of Ministers of the Word.
  2. The Office of Professors of Theology.
  3. The Office of Elders.
  4. The Office of Deacons.

The Reformed Church in the Netherlands first defined the offices to maintain in it at the Synod of Embden in 1571, three offices, that of minister, that of elder, that of deacon. Like order of offices was established in the Reformed Church of Germany and in the Reformed Church of France. It was the order originally in the Separatist Church of England, the church of the so-called Pilgrims; John Robinson, their pastor, and Elder William Brewster during their stay in Leyden, 1618, unite in writing: "Touching the Ecclesiastical minnistry namely—of Pastours for teaching, elders for Ruleing, and deacons for distributing the Churches Contribution, as alsoe for the two sacraments Baptism and the Lords Supper, wee doe wholly and in all points agree with the Ffrench Reformed Churches, according to their publick confession of ffaithe though some small differences." The three offices are in the Dutch Church as it comes to America. The first church was organized on Manhattan Island in 1628 with minister, two elders, and a deacon.

To these three officers a fourth, that of teacher or professor of theology, was added in 1771 by the Articles of Union and it remains firmly fixed in the church's organization.

It is not the tenet of the church that any exclusive order of offices is definitely commanded by the Scriptures or is necessary to the existence of a church. Nevertheless it magnifies Scriptural basis and example and regards itself as conforming well with the usage of Apostolic days. The New Testament refers to elders in many passages and to deacons. It apparently refers to preaching elders and to ruling elders. Our ministers are presbyters; they are preaching elders,

As to the deacon, Dean Stanley of the Anglican church many years ago said in his "Christian Institutions": "The only institution which retains at once the name and reality [of the office of deacon] is the Diaconate as it exists in the Dutch Church."

The teacher or professor of theology, in the list of four offices, stands in a little different light. While teachers are mentioned in the New Testament, giving ample precedent for the title and the work, nevertheless the office is not so integral a part, not a necessary part, of the church's organization and government. Men are not set apart for it by ordination. Those inducted into the office have no characteristic part in the government of a local church or of the denomination. It is conceivable that the denomination might appoint no professors at all, might exist without them as its officers, leaving their selection and commission to independent theological seminaries. The constitution of the church, however, of its own motion makes the office a part of the church system. In this country the first formal appointment to the office, that of the Reverend John H. Livingston, followed upon official action of the governing body, later the synod, naming certain ministers in the active pastorate, resident in different localities, to whom students should go for instruction in theology, preparation for the ministry.

The characteristic office of the church, that of elder, preaching and ruling, identifies our polity as presbyterial in distinction from the papal, the episcopal, the congregational, or the civil polity. The elder, or presbyter, is regarded as identical with the bishop in New Testament reference.

The four offices are not set forth as excluding possible addition to them. In the view of the church they have no sacred completeness. Proposal has been made more than once that the office of deaconess be added to them. The General Synod in 1850 (21) declined to give its approval. The General Synod in 1924 (585) declined to recommend that there be such office formally added in the church's system or that such officer be set apart by ordination, saying

at the same time that there was no objection to a local church appointing a worker or workers of its own with the title, deaconess, but without ordination and without place in the governing body of the church.

The question may arise whether the very existence of a church depends upon the presence in the organization of ordained officers, elders or deacons at least. While the presence of officers is necessary for the proper functioning of the body and their presence is called for at once and always wherever a church exists, it cannot be said that a body without them is necessarily no church. The provision of the constitution for the forming of new churches speaks of the formation as accomplished, the church organized, before officers are elected; elected at once, they are not the ordained officers of the existing organized church until three weeks later. If by untoward circumstance a church should at any time be bereft of all its officers the church would still remain.

6. The Ecclesiastical Assemblies and Judicatories in the Church are four:

1. The Consistory.
2. The Classis.
3. The Particular Synod.
4. The General Synod.

The ecclesiastical bodies of the church are deliberative and legislative; as such they are called assemblies. They are also judicial bodies; as such they are called judicatories. The first forming of such bodies in the Reformed Church in the Netherlands was very early. Synods, national or general, provincial or particular, were held irregularly but quite frequently from 1566. The Synod of Embden, 1571, established minister, elder, and deacon as a consistory. Classes were also defined. The National Synod of Dordrecht, 1578, formally established the four bodies of church government, the consistory, the classical assembly, the Particular Synod and the National or General Synod.

In America the consistory maintained from the earliest founding of the churches. In 1737 an assembly of a few

ministers led to a gradually developed coetus or classis, and to so-called circles. By the Plan or Articles of Union, 1771-2, there were created above the consistory five Particular Bodies, those of Albany, Hackensack, Kingston, New Brunswick, and New York, and a General Body. In 1785 the title, General Body, gave place to Synod and the title, Particular Body, to Classis. The constitution of 1792 definitely established as the order of governing bodies in America, the consistory, the classis, the Particular Synod, and the General Synod. There was at the time but one Particular Synod; its boundaries were the same as those of the General Synod, the entire church; it was a delegated body, two ministers and two elders from each classis; the General Synod was all the ministers with an elder from each church. In 1800 the Particular Synod was divided; the Particular Synod of New York and the Particular Synod of Albany were created. The Particular Synod of Chicago was constituted in 1856, the Particular Synod of New Brunswick in 1869, and the Particular Synod of Iowa in 1919.

The assemblies or judicatories do not trace themselves in any definite way to Scriptural organization or usage. The words, consistory and synod, both come from the pre-Reformation church. The word, classis, comes into use for the first with the Reformed Churches. Inheritance from the past, the new life of the Reformation, the need of adequate and effectual government in the later times are responsible for our present system of assemblies. It claims no sacredness, no exclusive propriety, no sure permanence in exactly present form. It does claim marked excellence as a well-adapted and smoothly-working system, not complicated, and singularly complete.

There is a prevailing correspondence in the bodies of other churches: session (and trustees), presbytery, synod, and General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church; vestry, diocese, and Convention of the Episcopal Church.

The words, presbytery and classis, were discussed by Professor Charles A. Briggs, the well-known Presbyterian scholar, in an article written in 1888: "A presbytery is a



body of presbyters or elders, however small or great. All ecclesiastical courts, from the highest to the lowest, are presbyteries. . . . The term, presbytery, is a Scotch term. The churches of the continent are followed by the Reformed churches in America in the use of the term, classis. This was the term used by the Westminster divines when they organized the Provincial Assembly of London with twelve classes in 1647. . . . We think that the term, classis, is a better one for several reasons: (a) It is inappropriate to take the term, presbytery, which belongs properly to all of these bodies, from the highest to the lowest, and use it for one of them. . . . (b) In view of a future union with the Reformed bodies, we shall have to resume the more appropriate name, classis, which is common to the Presbyterian and Reformed world. We can not expect them to take a term which is peculiar to Scotch Presbyterianism."

## ARTICLE II

### OF MINISTERS OF THE WORD

SECTION 7. The office of a minister is to preach the Word of God, and to administer the Sacraments; to watch over his brethren the elders and deacons as well as over the whole congregation, and in conjunction with the elders to exercise Christian discipline; to be careful that all things be done decently and in order. Every minister must consider himself devoted wholly to the Lord Jesus Christ in the service of the Church, and shall faithfully fulfill the obligations of his call in preaching, teaching and visiting his flock. He shall persevere in prayer, be urgent in season and out of season, and by word and example promote always the spiritual welfare of his people.

The office of the minister in dignity and importance yields to no other in human society. Its duties and obligations are varied and exacting. "To preach the word of God," stated first, gives emphasis to the prophetic office which at the Reformation received new importance in contrast with the priestly office which had gained supreme place. "To administer the sacraments" at once adds a function of the priestly office of the minister which needs and is receiving larger emphasis again at the present day. "To watch over his brethren . . . and exercise Christian discipline" presents the pastoral and executive function which completes the, broadly speaking, threefold aspect of the ministry.

In all three functionings of the office the minister is to be careful that all things be done decently and in order. Dignity in sermon and the conduct of worship, utmost care in maintaining the sacraments free from all that would mar their spiritual value, observance of all the proprieties in relation to officers and congregation and the conduct of the church's business—these things are never to be absent from the exercise of the ministerial office.

The activities of his office are further phrased, in effect repeated, in the words, "preaching, teaching, and visiting." All of these duties are set forth in the call made by a church and accepted by a minister, are therefore contract obligations as well as services inherent in the office itself, and must be faithfully fulfilled. It is surely proper, however, that in some circumstances the several duties be substantially divided between men associated in the same field. It is possible sometimes for a church to have a minister as primarily preacher, another or a layman as primarily visitor and pastor, even another or a layman as teacher of the children and youth, director of religious education. Even where, as is generally the case, there is only one minister and no employed layman, it is necessary for the minister to have his aids in the teaching of the children and youth, and it is very desirable that he be aided in the visiting of his congregation by elders or deacons or unofficial visitors of aptness and discretion. It is in any case quite natural that one minister prove to be more effective in his preaching, another more effective in his pastoral service; abilities and dispositions vary and equal excellence in all activities cannot be expected.

The personal spirit and life in the office of the ministry are too important to be left unstated. The minister must persevere in prayer, be earnestly diligent at all seasons, and set always a worthy example. Few marks of a man more prejudice a minister in the minds of the people than lack of diligence, a neglecting of zealous attention to all demands and opportunities of his office. A distinctly wrong example in word or conduct is fatal to the ministry; faults in conduct or word or spirit, poor judgment, faults in personal contacts, lack of common sense—all this impairs usefulness and even ends pastorates more often than lack of intellectual ability or of spiritual fervor. Sincere and deep spiritual life ought to encourage and develop the various useful human qualities for the service of the spiritual welfare of the people; which is the stated chief objective of the ministry.

"To preach the Word of God" clearly defines the subject-field of the pulpit. It is a positive but by no means narrow thesis. The Scriptures are the great treasury of truth which is to be unfolded. Ordinarily a verse or a passage will be taken as a text. Nothing will be said that the preacher is not convinced is a "thus saith the Lord." All that is contrary to God's Word, plainly beyond its field, is excluded. But it is equally plain that the Word of God touches every experience and activity of individual life and of society. The basing of a sermon on Scripture or the drawing of its message from Scripture does not necessarily involve the taking of a verbal text. It does not preclude the bringing to the pulpit of all that in the wide-world field may be addressed and served by the revelation of God. It does not discourage the utmost effort of the human mind, heart, conscience, to search out the deep things, to find that which does not lie open on the surface, to do what may be called original thinking toward larger understanding and application of the Word of God. In John Robinson's words: "I am very confident the Lord hath more truth and light to break forth out of His Holy Word"; but it will break forth through the able searching by men's minds guided by the Holy Spirit.

The words, "devoted wholly to the Lord Jesus Christ in the service of the Church," may give rise to some inquiry. A spirit of entire consecration is surely meant. More than that, a certain exclusive attention to the exercise of his office is intended. How far may this principle of exclusive occupation be pressed? It is plain that other occupation than the ministry in connection with the ministry is in general disapproved. Nevertheless, varied interests and activities not specifically of the church make constant and strong appeal to the minister; he is more than likely to be enlisted in educational, benevolent, and religious enterprise apart from the direct service of the local church and perhaps apart from the direct service of the denomination. More than that, a minister sometimes, by reason of small salary and by reason of small routine of church duties, feels justified in undertaking added occupation for the compensation re-

ceived. Secular teaching is most often in point perhaps; it has always been held as an especially consonant occupation; or perhaps purely business work is undertaken. It may certainly be said that no outside work should be undertaken which interferes with the direct service of the church or which results in inadequate attention to it. It may also certainly be said that no added work should be taken, especially for compensation, except after counsel with the officers of the church and with their consent. On the other hand, it may be said that there is much service of human society that seems to fall largely to the ministers of all denominations and which by common consent is regarded as the church's service of the Kingdom of God. It is also to be noted that the words, "devoted wholly," relate immediately to Jesus Christ, and that the words, "in the service of the Church," by the use of the capital letter relate specifically to the whole Church of Jesus Christ, or at least to the denomination; the local church, while so intimately involved, is not the field here spoken of. (This distinction of capital letter and small letter is not made use of in these notes.)

It is of most positive importance that in certain relations the office of the minister is an agency of the state, that the minister is a representative of the state as well as an officer of the church. Performing the marriage ceremony as a religious function, the minister is carrying out a civil transaction. Marriage in the view of the state is a civil rather than a religious institution. The minister is authorized by the state to establish the marriage bond. In other connections also his fulfilling of his duties is related to civil statutes. It is imperative, therefore, that a minister become clearly and fully aware of the statutes in the state of his residence which concern his official actions and that all their requirements be carefully observed.

8. Only those persons shall be allowed to exercise the office of a minister who have been inducted into that office by ordination, according to the Word of God and the order established by the Church. No person who has once been ordained shall be at liberty to relinquish the active work of the ministry or to relinquish the office of a minister by demission, unless for reasons

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of weight concerning which the Classis shall inquire and determine.

The name of a person thus demitting the ministry shall be stricken from the roll of Classis.

Ordination is emphasized as the essential introduction to the ministry. It is a scriptural act; it must be according to God's Word. It is an act worthy of utmost care in word and substance; it must be according to the order of the church, that is its formal and official arrangements. Ordination must be especially free from casualness or irregularity.

When it is said that none but the ordained shall exercise the office of a minister, some comments are invited. No unordained person may exercise the full office of the minister; he may not become the installed pastor of any church; he may not, in anything he does, regard himself or be regarded by others as in the office of a minister. Nevertheless, there are many things included in the office work of the minister which one not ordained to the office may do. He may address the congregation, to all intents and purposes preach to them; in the absence of a minister an elder on occasion may do this; it were well perhaps if elders here and there were more qualified and more availed of for this. In teaching and in visiting also, one not ordained to the office of the minister may be active with entire propriety and much usefulness; the elders and deacons are definitely directed toward the duty of visitation; a member of the church, ordained to no office, may be equally correct and useful in teaching and visiting.

While there may be some idea of such activities on the part of non-ministers as in some way different from similar activities residing in the office of the minister, it is plain that the distinction at these points is not at all so clear or sure as that at the point of the sacraments. These definitely are not to be administered by anyone not ordained to the office of the ministry. Once again, however, it is pertinent to add that in extraordinary circumstances when for some reason the sacrament of baptism or the sacrament of the Lord's Supper seems extremely important and no minister is available or can promptly become available as administra-

tor, an elder or a deacon or even an unordained member of the church possibly would regard it as his responsibility and privilege to administer the sacrament. It would be extra-constitutional; it would be an irregularity, appropriate, if at all, only in most extraordinary circumstance; but the sacrament would be administered, with perhaps extraordinary value to those thus served. In taking this view or in such extraordinary giving of the sacrament one may perhaps bring to thought the universal priesthood of believers, a cardinal truth accepted throughout the church. An officer or church member, not ordained to the ministry, thus officiating would be subject to inquiry by the church judicatory and liable to discipline.

The office of the ministry is without term, ordination to it is presumptively for life. The active work of the ministry is also presumed to continue while continuance is possible. The discontinuing of the active work is subject to the review of the classis. The reasons for it are to be submitted to the classis and if they are judged sufficient the discontinuance is approved. Adequate reasons are various, physical or mental infirmity, impeding circumstance of some sort, pressing necessity of some other work in some important interest, call to denominational position or to service of allied institutions outside the church organization. While the formal report to the classis in such case is the formal propriety, an omitting of it is far from uncommon. Sometimes a minister, no longer serving a church or carrying on stated ministerial work, remains thus without charge without formal statement to the classis and without the classis passing judgment. Custom has come to leave this matter quite largely to the individual judgment and conscience. The word here, however, should be given its full weight, that the work of the office is not to be discontinued without adequate reason and that the making of inquiry and the passing of judgment are properly in the procedure of the classis.

A demitting of the ministry, a voluntary surrender of the office, is new in the life and order of the church. In the past

the principle of perpetual office was emphasized at this point, that no one could voluntarily surrender it, that it ended only with death or discipline. But the Protestant theory is not so rigid as the Roman Catholic as to the perpetuity of orders. Now the privilege of withdrawal is formally allowed, but, again, only for reasons of weight in the estimate of the classis. In this proceeding the classis, its action, is absolutely essential. There is no demitting the office of the ministry save as the classis approves, allows, and pronounces it. It is a rare action. Ministers desiring no longer to carry on the stated work of the ministry generally, with or without classis' review, cease the accustomed activity without desiring to be no longer ministers. One may, however, desire to demit the ministry simply because he does not wish to be active in it. Or one may have so changed in his doctrinal or religious views that he feels it appropriate, even necessary, that he be no longer a minister. Or one may feel that something his conscience approves is an offence to the common conscience. The classis, weighing the request and the reasons whatsoever they be, may grant the request; the name is struck from the roll of the classis, and the man is no longer a minister of the church.

It might be that a minister guilty of some fault or offence, in some way morally delinquent, well conscious of the fact, would wisely wish to demit the ministry. The question might arise whether the classis could properly allow him to do so, or whether it ought to proceed to discipline him. While different cases might deserve different treatment and while classes might differ from one another on the point, and the judgment of any one would be decisive in its jurisdiction, it is impossible to say that a classis would act unlawfully in permitting such a requesting minister to demit his office; it might be the wisest course, the one most conducive to the general good, productive of the least harm.

Should a one-time minister, no longer in the office by reason of demission or deposition, desire again to enter the office and be approved by the classis for new fulfilling of

the office, he would need to be re-ordained. His ordained status had ceased and would not automatically revive.

9. Any member of a Reformed Church who contemplates entering the work of the ministry shall furnish to one of the theological schools satisfactory evidence of his being a member of the Church in full communion and in good standing, and of his piety, abilities and literary attainments, before he begins his course of theological studies. He shall thereupon be admitted into the school and during the prosecution of his studies there shall be subject to its rules and regulations. When he shall have completed the prescribed course of theological studies, he shall be admitted to an examination according to the regulations of the school as established by the General Synod, and if found qualified shall receive a professorial certificate which shall entitle him to examination for licensure by the Classis to which the church belongs of which he was a member when he entered upon his theological studies.

The presumption of the church is that its ministry comes primarily from its own membership and its own training. It starts its formal consideration of the supply of the ministry with the words, "any member of a Reformed Church who contemplates entering the work of the ministry." It regards him as in certain way or degree under its advice and direction; he is one of its members, he is expecting ordination by it, he proposes to enter its service. It says that he shall address himself to "one of the theological schools," that is, one of the theological seminaries of the church. At present these are the seminaries at New Brunswick, New Jersey, Holland, Michigan, and Arcot, India.

The reasons for this directing of the student to a theological seminary of the church are evident and excellent. The ministry and service of the denomination are in point. The seminaries have been established and are maintained by the efforts and gifts of the church for the purpose of training its ministry. The professors are appointed as men trusted and approved and especially appropriate to the denominational task in point. There is a distinctive quality of the church thus incorporate in the training, not available elsewhere and of substantial value for the later work among the churches. There is a principle of

loyalty involved which is apt to all the life, work, and institutions of which one is a part, a principle of loyalty which will inevitably be a point of appeal to a congregation by the man himself from the day of his graduation from theological school into the active pastorate. Members of other denominations as well as members of the Reformed Church in America may be received as students.

To the theological school, that is to its professors, with committee of the Board of Superintendents usually associate, the candidate for entrance is to present credentials of his fitness to be received: evidence of his church membership, of his character and personal religion, of his intellectual ability, and of his attainments in study. It is not required that he shall have studied at any particular college or at any college at all. The constitution has not taken cognizance of him until he is presumptively far enough advanced for entrance upon the theological study. This does not preclude, however, definite advice on the part of those representing the church and familiar with the student in earlier years that he attend a certain college for reasons that especially commend it in the premises. Nor does it preclude such agency of the church as the Board of Education from making its appropriations for the college education of a student contemplating the work of the ministry conditional upon his attendance at one of certain colleges either directly connected or intimately associated with the church; this is most appropriate since the attention of the church in such instance is active a step further back than that dealt with by the constitution, and substantial responsibility is assumed for education toward the ministry in college years.

When the evidence of literary attainments is here mentioned, it primarily, most naturally, refers to a college diploma; this is not specified as a requirement. The theological school itself, under any direction or advice of the church, is responsible for the deciding of requirements; it may, naturally, decide that in all normal circumstances a college diploma shall be necessary to admission; it may



decide that attainments apparently equivalent to those represented by a diploma may be adequate credential without the diploma itself; it may decide that in special cases, perhaps of unusual maturity or unusual type of education or of unusual spiritual and practical promise, less literary attainment than this shall be adequate. There is no stated requirement as to the specific subjects in which the accomplished studies have been pursued. The theological school itself must deal with this question also. It naturally will ask for evidence of studies which have prepared the student to enter upon and to carry on well the particular studies of the school. The great variance in the program of college studies at the present day and the varying choice of students in college who may, with or without view to the ministry in college days, turn to theological education when graduated from college, ought but rarely to be a barrier to admission. In this connection also such agency as the Board of Education is in plain and responsible position. Representing the church in the preparation of a college student for later theological education, it properly may make its financial cooperation with him dependent upon his pursuing such studies as in its judgment especially serve his life purpose, at least upon his not omitting one or a few regarded as quite essential.

The rules and regulations of the school to which its student is to be subject are in part enactments of the school itself and in part enactments of the church. The General Synod, naturally and wisely leaving much to the school itself, its officers and professors, possesses and exercises a final authority. The prescribed courses of theological study, composed and from time to time modified by the Faculty, are subject to approval, and indeed are under definite general adoption, by the General Synod. An examination as well as a definite course of studies is prescribed. Regulations of the General Synod covering these matters for the seminaries are found in the synod's minutes of various years.

A professorial certificate is to be given the student who

has completed the studies and sustained the examination. It is a diploma in effect but not in form that is here directed. The church's interest in the matter is not so much that he has graduated from the school as that he is qualified for appearance before classis. It is a forward look toward the ministry, the church's great objective. The final and complete certificate of the school gives the graduated student the right to be examined by classis for licensure, its action preliminary to anticipated ordination. The classis is obligated to give him the opportunity to gain its approval.

It is required that this appearance and examination be in the classis to which the church belongs of which the graduate was a member when he entered upon his theological studies, that is, his studies in the theological school, not his earlier studies with the ministry in view. This is a somewhat recent amendment to the constitution. Formerly a student might transfer his membership from one church to another during his seminary course, perhaps from his home church to a church in the seminary town, and at graduation present himself for examination to the classis to which this latter church belonged. The new requirement is plainly wise. It is right that the home church and classis should have the privilege and responsibility of passing upon one whom they ecclesiastically brought up and whom they gave to the work of the ministry. Personal preference for the classis of later connection for any reason, perhaps personal convenience, is not of weight against the manifest propriety of jurisdiction by the classis of original connection.

10. The examination for licensure shall inquire strictly into the attainments of the student in the original languages and exegesis of the Sacred Scriptures, in Biblical introduction, in ecclesiastical history and in methods of sermonizing. He shall be examined especially respecting his knowledge in theology, his piety, his views in desiring to become a minister of the Gospel, and his adherence to the accepted Standards of the Reformed Church.

The examination for licensure may be held at a regular or special session of the classis, the president or stated clerk having been informed of the desire for it. Usually one mem-

ber of the classis is appointed special examiner in one subject, another member in another subject, all members sharing in any part of the examination as they may be inclined. The subjects of examination are not quite the same as those of examination prior to ordination; the sacraments and church government and the duties of the ministry are not in the list since the merely licensed man has no official relation to these things. His knowledge of theology and his adherence to the standards of the church and his methods of sermonizing are especially in point since preaching is the special work for which the license is to be given. Naturally, also, the classis could not proceed unless satisfied as to the applicant's sincere religious life and right motives in desiring the work of the ministry.

11. Whoever is approved by the Classis upon examination and before he is licensed to preach must present his credentials as a member of the Church, and attest his adherence to the doctrines of the Gospel by subscribing to the following formula:

We, the underwritten, in becoming candidates for the ministry, do by this our subscription, sincerely and in good conscience before the Lord, declare that we believe the Gospel of the Grace of God in Christ Jesus as revealed in the Holy Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments, and as truly set forth in the Standards of the Reformed Church in America, and that we reject all errors which are contrary thereto.

We promise that we will with diligence and faithfulness teach the Gospel and defend the Standards of our faith, and will set forth the Gospel as God may give us grace in our life and conversation, and that we will avoid contradicting the same by word or example. We further promise that should we ever have any doubts as to this Gospel or these Standards of our faith we will first communicate our sentiments to the ecclesiastical judicatory under which we stand, and will subject ourselves to its counsel and decision.

The license to preach is granted by the classis when the applicant after examination has been approved, his credentials of church membership (not letter of dismissal) have been received, and he has signed the formula here in the constitution fully set forth.

Concerning the formula and subscription it may be commented, first of all, that the initial emphasis is differently

and more excellently placed than in the words appearing in past years in the constitution. It supremely sets forth belief in the Gospel of the Grace of God in Christ Jesus; it then describes this as revealed in the Holy Scriptures; it then describes it as truly set forth in the standards of the Reformed Church in America. Formerly the initial words were a testifying that the standards "are fully conformable to the Word of God."

Belief in the "Gospel of the Grace of God in Christ Jesus . . . as truly set forth in the Standards" plainly means acceptance of the standards as a true presenting of the gospel. No one could well sign the formula who did not realize and accept this meaning. At the same time every single statement in the standards does not seem necessarily involved. That every word in them sets forth in its degree and with unvarying exactness the Gospel of the Grace of God in Christ Jesus is quite impossible; the man-made statements are not infallible; in long documents there are quite inevitably incidental as well as central statements; there may be an old-time expression which would be used by scarce anyone today, as in the Belgic Confession certain words concerning the duty of civil magistrates, and in the Heidelberg Catechism certain words concerning the popish mass. It will be noted also that this gospel "as revealed in . . . the Old and New Testaments" is so revealed in chief sayings of the Scriptures and in the Scriptures as a whole, that there are sayings in the Scriptures which surely are not essential to or the expression of it. It will be noted also that the rejection of errors included in the subscription, while fairly related to the standards, is primarily a rejection of "errors contrary thereto," that is contrary to the Gospel of the Grace of God in Christ Jesus.

The subscription also is a promise to teach the gospel, to be loyal to it in life and conversation as well as in preaching. It is a promise to defend the standards of our faith. This is not to be understood as presenting a duty to search for attacks upon the standards, to initiate or foster controversies, to give large attention to points where churches

differ or where the enemies of all religion may especially indulge their opinions. It does mean the assuming of an obligation to be clear, courageous, outspoken in the expressing and supporting of what our standards set forth when occasion arises, when the gospel, the substance of it, the welfare of the church which confesses it, demands such defense. It is always to be borne in mind that points in the standards are of varying importance, that ready and vigorous defense may be in order touching the more important, while less important points may be given the less attention. It may sometimes be a plain duty to distinguish between the central and the incidental, between the spirit which makes alive and the letter which kills.

The subscription is also a promise, if any doubts as to the gospel or the standards should arise, to communicate them to the judicatory concerned and to submit to its counsel and decision. Doubts may be small and but passing. One would properly wait until doubts were quite surely of consequence before troubling the judicatory with them. If of consequence and if regarded by the judicatory as incompatible with the preaching privilege accorded, the counsel and decision to that effect would mean either the clearing away of the doubts, or an understanding that the doubts would not be set forth, would be held in abeyance while thought matured, or a revoking of the license to preach.

An individual conscience ought not to be compelled to decide against entering the ministry, against entering the ministry of the Reformed Church in America, because it must retain a certain continued freedom. It cannot be insisted that there must be no latitude, after entering the ministry, in interpreting the Scriptures or in interpreting the standards. In the words of the man under examination there must be honesty, sincerity, frankness. From him there cannot be expected fully matured and final views upon many subjects. Upon the classis rests the responsibility of deciding the fitness of the candidate in his beliefs as well as in his abilities and life and spirit. The classis must be



faithful to its responsibility; at the same time it should not be narrow, over-exacting, ungenerous.

At a recent examining for ordination a classis received from the candidate a written "statement of belief," incorporating it in the minutes, and allowed him to sign the formula with the words appended "Subject to the action of classis on October ——," that is the action of receiving and approving the statement. This was called to the attention of Particular Synod and the classis was "requested to correct an error in connection with the signing of the formula in the case mentioned." The classis in its answer said: "The formula was not signed with reservations. The formula was signed after explanations had been made by the candidate as to his interpretation of some of the details of the standards. The classis, by an almost unanimous vote, decided that these interpretations were in accord with the doctrines as taught by the standards. It is the prerogative and duty of classis to pass upon just such questions as this, as it does after an examination of any candidate in doctrine. In this instance the question and answers were given by the candidate himself, seeking the opinion of classis as to his conformity to the doctrines of the Reformed Church in America." The Particular Synod accepted the reply as satisfactory. It is quite clear that in so far the procedure was in order. A written statement may be received and may be incorporated in the minutes; and the classis passes upon the candidate's conformity to the standards shown in either oral or written words. It is to be added, however, that the original criticism of the Particular Synod was without doubt, directed to the writing of the words "Subject to the action of classis" with the name in the signing of the formula, that this was the "error." While the synod did not pursue the matter, it may with reason be said that any such added writing where the formula is signed does not seem to be good practice, that it should be avoided as unnecessary, as not surely clear in meaning, and as inappropriate in the space set apart for only signature and date.

12. A Classis may recommend to the General Synod that a dispensation be granted to any person from any of the above requirements as to study and the professorial certificate, provided the Classis is satisfied as to his gifts, piety and promise of usefulness. Such recommendation shall always be accompanied by a full statement of reasons therefor. No dispensation shall be granted in any case except by the General Synod on the recommendation of a Classis.

The thesis that one contemplating the ministry of the church, coming primarily from its membership, comes from its own theological school and from an approved order of training is not set up as universally maintained. There may be exceptions. The word used is dispensation. It is a word taken from old Church of Rome usage, an allowing of the irregular, an exception from requirement. The importance of the thesis, however, is so definite that the exception can be granted only by the General Synod. The theological school cannot grant it. The classis cannot grant it but it has the privilege of recommendation; and action by the General Synod is initiated only by such recommendation "accompanied by full statement." The classis is in near position to familiarize itself with the person in any one of its churches who wishes a dispensation and to judge the merits of the case. The General Synod, however, always examines carefully into the reasons when a recommendation is received and acts in its own discretion, not seldom refusing to take favorable action.

The dispensation may be asked from any of the requirements as to study—that is from certain subject or subjects of required study, perhaps the languages, or from the usual term of study, or from study in one of the theological schools of the church. That study in one of these schools was one of the "requirements as to study" was not clear to everyone reading the constitution in time past. It is made sure in the present form of the constitution by the words, "and the professorial certificate," that is, very specifically, that a person seeking the ministry without the certificate of the professors of one of the church's theological schools

must have General Synod's dispensation before the classis can proceed with his examination.

It will be noted, as already stated, that academic subjects, the studies of a college course, are not concerned; nor is college attendance itself; the concern is only with those requirements which are directly recited in the provisions of the constitution governing preparation and examination, that is, the order of theological study.

Reasons commending persons for a dispensation are various. A man may be advanced in years, may be married with family dependent upon him, may find theological study or especially the languages almost impossible because of lack of earlier training or because of mental inaptness. At the same time he may have unusual gifts, spiritual and practical, for the work of the ministry. In character, in ability for public address, in resources for pastoral service, he may highly commend himself, may have proved himself worthy in known circumstance and activity. Such or other group of considerations may justify the granting of a dispensation, the classis and General Synod being satisfied as to "gifts, piety, and promise of usefulness."

It is plain that such apparent support of the application is not always conclusive. While many a man thus admitted to the ministry has well rewarded the church by his fruitful service, there is a fair and strong presumption against the admitting to the ministry of men without thorough training. Classes, and the General Synod in turn, should always be singularly careful in their study of these applications and, presumably, should but rarely favor them. It is, besides, an excellent thing often for the classis, taking an applicant under its consideration and favorably disposed toward him, to arrange for his pursuing of some studies and coming to some added attainments before recommending him to the General Synod, such work to be under the direction of one of the ministers or more than one.

Upon the theological school itself rests the responsibility of conserving a well-trained ministry not only by the excellence of its own work but also by its tests in admitting

students to its courses. No dispensation from General Synod being necessary to entrance, necessity falls upon it to decide against the admission of one who, it feels, has not the academic preparation appropriate to the work of the school and of the ministry to follow. To a man of exceptional promise in other ways it may make concession. It may also possibly admit to some of its courses, while allowing some subjects to be omitted in which the student must be later examined by the classis unless dispensation is obtained.

The dispensation from the professorial certificate is usually granted. That is, the graduate from another theological school than those of the church is made eligible to examination by the classis to which the church belongs of which the person is a member. While this is done so graciously, with so little objection, it is not to be forgotten that the primary injunction of the church to its member-student is to attend its own institution and that good and convincing reasons should not be absent when this direction of the constitution is not followed. It would be a right procedure if a student, planning his course in other school, were directed to present to classis and General Synod the reasons therefor, and his request for dispensation before the institution in mind is entered. It will also be again noted that such agency as the Board of Education, in its financial cooperating, has right to make its appropriations conditional upon study at the institutions of its church.

13. Every person who is licensed to preach is a candidate for the ministry. He is under the immediate direction of the Classis which examined him, and is to visit such congregations and preach in such places as the Classis shall designate. If no particular directions are given, he may preach at his own discretion in any congregation which shall invite him.

The license to preach granted by the classis to the person who has approved himself under examination by it gives him the status of a candidate. In other denominations the licensed person is called a licentiate; this word is not

used in our procedure. The word, candidate, stresses the temporary and forward-looking position of the man. He is a candidate for the ministry. He has not yet become an officer of the church in the group of the church's officers named by the constitution. He is in anticipation of becoming an officer, a minister. The presumption is that he is not to remain long only licensed to preach. In only rare instances has a candidate remained permanently a candidate, going no further in the path the church order contemplates.

In receiving his license the man comes under the immediate direction of the classis; he is now under its authority and in its service. He is first of all subject to its assignments, congregations he may visit and pulpits in which he may preach being designated by the classis. This active oversight by the classis is not often specifically and persistently exercised. The term of the candidate status is usually very brief and particular directions by the classis are generally not given. Congregations may invite him and, free from directions, he may give service in his discretion. The approval of the classis is always to be assumed, however; and its disapproval at any time might be in order. The General Synod in 1897 (687) required that a candidate report regularly to classis. A congregation may invite him simply as a pulpit supply for a day or for a term, or may invite him with a view to the possible calling of him to be its minister.

The word, candidate, has been wrongly used sometimes in connection with students in theological school or college who have formally made known to the classis their study for the ministry and have been recommended by it to the Board of Education; such use has even crept into the minutes of a classis and of the General Synod. Such use is definitely excluded by the technical meaning which attaches with the word in the Reformed Church procedure.

14. A candidate for the ministry shall not be a delegate to represent a church in any ecclesiastical assembly, nor shall he in any circumstances administer the Sacraments of the Church.



The candidate has, as such, no official standing appropriate to the position of delegate. He may be quite continuously supplying the pulpit and even doing the pastoral work of a church but it cannot make him its representative in classis, and classis cannot delegate him to synod. Only the installed minister or an elder or both can serve in that capacity. The question may arise whether a candidate who has been and still is an elder in his church, which is not impossible, might represent his church in his capacity as elder. Apparently he could. His status as elder has not been destroyed by his becoming a candidate for the ministry; and it is fairly to be assumed that the constitution in this provision is speaking of the candidate only in his capacity as such and is not depriving him of any right or privilege belonging to him as an elder if he holds that office. At the same time it is usually to be assumed that a candidate, anticipating early ordination to the ministry, will have retired from the office of elder if he has held it at all.

The candidate is not authorized to administer the sacraments. Very definitely here are differenced two functions especially attaching with the office of a minister. The candidate, not yet a minister, has a license to preach but he has not the privilege of administering baptism or the Lord's Supper. The prophetic work is more liberally allowed; in Holland the candidates were called prophets or proponents. The priestly function, if we may call the service of the sacraments that, is less liberally allowed. The distinction is clear. The restraint from the latter service applies to "any circumstance." If, as already mentioned, an extra-constitutional officiating seem urgent in extraordinary circumstance, a sacrificing of regularity for the spiritual benefit at stake, the elder would be more qualified for this than the candidate, he having been ordained an officer of the church.

15. A candidate who has subscribed to the formula required for licensure shall be entitled to a certificate signed by the president and stated clerk of the Classis before which the examination has been held. This shall contain a license to preach the Gospel.

Such license at the request of the candidate, or for cause, may be revoked by the Classis under whose care he may be.

The certificate to which the candidate is entitled is not in any verbal form constitutionally fixed. It is to be signed by both the president and the stated clerk of classis; and it shall contain a license to preach the gospel. It may recite in more or less detail the fact that he has sustained examination by the classis and is approved in other ways as well. This is his credential at any possible questioning anywhere of his right to occupy a pulpit, to conduct public worship.

Once given by classis, it can be revoked only by classis. It is subject to revoking. It is so different a thing from ordination that, unlike ordination, it may be summarily withdrawn and the status of candidate without judicial procedure ended. This revoking may be at the request of the candidate. He may have come to the conclusion that he is not called by God to the ministry; he may have become so doubtful about some teachings of the church that he feels that he cannot take upon him its ministry obligations; he may have been compelled to face insistent duties, the fulfilling of which forbids entering the service he had chosen. Or still other reason may prompt his request. It is an admirable provision of our church, though rarely availed of, that permits such person to withdraw before the impending ordination without trouble and without discredit.

The revoking may be for cause. During the period of the license it may have become evident that its continuance is not justified. The candidate may have proved physically or mentally or temperamentally or morally unfit. Some particular incident or some general condition may be in point. The classis does not need to go through any judicial procedure. Convinced that the cause is sufficient, it may revoke the license. It is not an act of discipline. If there be occasion for discipline by reason of ill character or misconduct, it is for the church of which he is a member to proceed; his license as a candidate has not destroyed his local church membership and has not added a classis mem-

bership; it has left him amenable to the elders of his church.

There is no reference to the passing of a candidate from the care of one classis to that of another. Not a member of the classis, he cannot be dismissed as a member. As a member of the local church, he may be dismissed to a local church in another classis; in this case it is reasonable to assume that his subordination to the one classis passes to the other classis, accompanying his church membership. It is appropriate and desirable, however,—necessary perhaps—for the one classis to address to the other a letter transferring the care of the candidate, and that action accepting the responsibility be taken by the other classis. The fact that ordination so generally follows licensure without delay admits rare occasion for such procedure.

16. A candidate shall be entitled to an examination for ordination when he has purposed to accept a call to a church, or when he is to be assigned to missionary or other ministerial work, either under the direction of a Consistory or of a Classis or in foreign lands. The Classis may accept in this final examination results of a previous examination before another Classis duly certified as respects the candidate's scholarly attainments, his methods of sermonizing, his knowledge of the original languages and exegesis of the Sacred Scriptures, of Biblical introduction and of ecclesiastical history, in lieu of the repetition of such examinations. The candidate shall be examined on the duties of the ministry, on church government and on the nature and administration of the Sacraments, and shall be re-examined in theology, and as to his piety and his views in desiring to become a minister of the Gospel.

Ordination to the ministry is presumed to follow in ordinary course of events upon licensure as a candidate. The candidate is entitled to an examination for ordination, but only under conditions which naturally arise; in the absence of these definite conditions he cannot be examined or ordained. The way is clear for the examination if he has purposed to accept a call to a church; this is the most prevailing occasion; a candidate is rarely without the offer of a call; he purposes to accept one that is offered him. Or he may be examined if, not receiving and accepting a

call to a church, he is to be assigned to missionary or other ministerial work in foreign lands; that is, he is to go to the foreign mission field under assignment of the church, presumably through its Board of Foreign Missions; ordination for such service has always been approved. Or he may be examined if he is to be assigned to missionary or other ministerial work under the direction of a classis; the classis may carry on missionary or supply work within its own borders or even beyond its own borders and desire to carry it on through a minister fully qualified rather than through a candidate; ordination for such service has always been approved. Or he may be examined if he is to be assigned to missionary or other ministerial work under the direction of a consistory; this has been allowed only by a recent amending of the constitution; a consistory may desire an assistant to its minister, a director of religious work, a worker in the church vicinity, and its proposed assignment to such position opens the way to a candidate's examination and ordination although the church is not calling him to be its minister or even to be an installed associate or assistant minister.

The significance of this careful reciting of the conditions which alone sustain the candidate's privilege of examination for ordination by the classis is that the church positively and clearly disapproves the ordination of a candidate to the ministry when the church he is to serve is not determined or other ministerial work under official direction is not definitely arranged. In other words there is no ordination to a free lance or roving ministry. The places and the kind of activities may become changeful and uncertain very soon; but at the moment of ordination they must be positive and officially recognized.

The classis which is to examine for ordination need not repeat the examination in certain specified subjects of the examination already held for license to preach; it is not compelled to omit them—it may repeat them; if it elects to omit them, it must be on the basis of a certified statement of the results of the prior examination in those sub-

jects, a certificate presumably of the stated clerk or other authorized officer of the classis which held the examination for license to preach. Certain subjects not in the earlier examination must now be dealt with, duties of the ministry, church government, and the sacraments, since the ordained minister must take up full relationship with these things until this time not clearly within his province. That there must be a re-examination in theology, piety, and views in desiring to become a minister is reasonable since the classis within whose bounds, usually, the ordained man is to enter into his work ought to be satisfied from its own inquiries on these points as well as aided by the approval of the classis from which the candidate comes, especially as some time may have intervened between the two examinations. The classis will, as in prelude to licensure, conduct the examination by any method agreeable to it.

17. The examination of the candidate for ordination shall be conducted by the Classis within whose bounds he is to labor; or, if he is to work in foreign fields, by the Classis to which he belongs.

That examination for ordination should be by the classis within whose bounds the ordained man is to serve is reasonable as just stated. So, too, it is natural that if he is to work in foreign field the examination should be by the classis in whose bounds he has his church membership; he is not to work within the bounds of another classis, and his home classis may well send him forth to his distant field. There is no permission given to a classis to delegate its privilege and responsibility of examination for ordination itself to another classis. Considerations of time and distance are not weighty enough to make such provision necessary or wise. Nor is it in keeping with the dignity of the office that the examination be given by a committee of the classis apart from the classis itself formally and fully convened.

18. The candidate upon giving satisfaction in this examination, shall request a transfer of his membership to the church which he expects to serve, in accordance with the provisions of the Con-



stitution as respects transfers of membership, and shall subscribe to the following formula:

We, the underwritten, in becoming ministers of the Word of God within the bounds of the Classis of ———, do by this our subscription, sincerely and in good conscience before the Lord, declare that we believe the Gospel of the Grace of God in Christ Jesus as revealed in the Holy Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments, and as truly set forth in the Standards of the Reformed Church in America and that we reject all errors which are contrary thereto. We promise that we will exert ourselves to keep the Church free from such errors.

We promise, that we will with all diligence and faithfulness teach the Gospel and defend the Standards of our faith, without either directly or indirectly contradicting the same by preaching or writing; and that we will set forth the Gospel as God may give us grace in our life and conversation without contradicting the same by word or example.

We further promise that should we ever have any doubts as to this Gospel of the Grace of God in Christ Jesus, or as to the Standards of our faith, we will neither propose nor teach the same, but will first communicate our views to the Classis to which we belong, and will subject ourselves to its counsel and decision, under penalty in case of refusal to be *ipso facto* suspended from our office. We do further promise to be always ready to comply with a requisition from Consistory or Classis for an explanation of our views respecting any particular article of our Standards aforesaid, under a penalty of censure or suspension from the ministry; reserving to ourselves, however, the right of an appeal to a higher judicatory, and, until decision is made upon such appeal, we will acquiesce in the determination and judgment already passed.

Every minister in passing from one Classis to another shall likewise sign this formula in the Classis which he joins.

The minister's membership in the local church here referred to is a new fact in the order and procedure of the church. Until recent amending of the constitution a minister had no such status. When a member of the church studied theology, became a candidate, was ordained to the ministry, his membership in his local church was regarded as at an end. There was not a formal letter of dismissal from church to classis, but the membership in the classis *ipso facto* took the place of the membership in the church. Note of the change was properly made in the church's registry book of communicants. Now under provisions of the constitution the local church membership does not cease; it endures coincident

with membership in the classis. Here it is directed that, examined and about to be ordained, the candidate transfer his membership from the church of which he is a member to the church which he expects to serve. Before this he might have asked a letter to any church of his choice at any time. But now it is a requirement that he shall ask a letter of dismission to the church to which he is going as a minister. The transfer is not *ipso facto*.

There is no reference to transfer of church membership for the candidate who at ordination is to go to foreign field or to do missionary work under direction of classis. He may continue his membership where it is or may ask letter of dismission to such church as may be agreeable to him or most convenient to any new residence or to the assigned field of work. It is not unreasonable also to consider that the words, "the church which he expects to serve," relate to service as called and installed minister not necessarily service as only employed assistant or missionary under direction of the consistory. While it would be natural and wise usually to transfer membership to the church whose service is to be entered, nevertheless obligation is not apparent; and considerations of various sort might sustain the continuing of membership at what was in real and important ways the home church.

The formula which attaches with entrance upon the office of minister corresponds in much of its phrasing with that attaching with license to preach. The primary emphasis is the same. Much that was said in connection with the one here applies to the other, only if possible with increased emphasis. Some words are added to the earlier formula, especially stating details of promised attitude toward classis if doctrinal views come at all in question.

There is added promise to exert oneself to keep the church free from errors. This is always done by clear and strong presenting of the truth. It may be by the direct answering of errors which may somehow address themselves to the people. It may be by careful and wise discussion and decision in judicatories of the church. In recognizing the pul-

pit as the place for not only presenting truth but also for occasionally opposing errors of belief, it is well to bear in mind that doubts and unbeliefs are sometimes suggested and circulated rather than removed by their mention to the general congregation.

It is also added that there will be no direct or indirect contradicting of the gospel or the standards by way of either preaching or writing. This would not be expected of anyone sincere in his ministry. Simple honesty would insure it. Wisdom also would plainly say that some doubt or difference which may have arisen in the mind, variance from some incidental saying of the standards, does not, for honesty's sake, demand expression in the pulpit or in print. It is little less than folly to set forth some varying personal idea when the people are waiting and wanting to be served by the great truths of the gospel and of the standards. This thought is developed in the words of the formula, similar to those in the candidate formula, that, should any doubts arise, they will not be proposed or taught, that they will be first communicated to the classis. Receiving the counsel and decision of the classis, refusal to accede will, it is added, have its issue in an *ipso facto* suspending from office, the office of minister, a penalty imposed by classis without process of trial or formal conviction; the condemning statement of variant views has been made by the minister himself.

In the formula it is further added that there will always be readiness to explain views that are held regarding any article in the standards when explanation is asked. It is noted that both classis and consistory are mentioned as competent to ask such explanation. The word, consistory, is here used perhaps in its old meaning of the elders. The church which the minister is serving has a right through its officers to ask statement from him if he has by some utterance given ground for the inquiry. When penalty is mentioned, however, the classis rather than the consistory is in point. A consistory, or the elders, might express to their minister their disapproval of him for views they con-

sider in error, or for the utterance of them; but this could not be formal discipline or penalty; that is not within their province. Censure is here mentioned. Its meaning is not perfectly clear. The word does not occur in the list of formal acts of discipline, section 132. Here listed precedent to suspension, the more severe formal discipline, it may perhaps be understood as equivalent to admonition, the less severe formal discipline named by the constitution. No penalty would be imposed without formal trial and conviction save in *ipso facto* cases as above.

In agreeing to this detailed relationship with lower judicatories, the minister expressly reserves his right to appeal to higher judicatory, proposing acquiescence in given decision until higher judicatory may have reversed it.

It is required that a minister sign the formula in the book of each classis, in which from time to time he may become a member.

19. The Classis before which the examination of a candidate is held shall fix a day for his ordination. The ordination shall be conducted by the Classis with proper solemnity. A sermon suitable to the occasion shall be preached, and the promises, directions, explanations of duty, and the laying on of hands shall be according to the form for ordination in the Liturgy. A certificate of ordination shall be given, signed by the president and stated clerk of the Classis, and the minister shall then be enrolled as one of its members.

The ordination of a minister is always by the classis. No local church and no one of the other judicatories is endowed with this power. It should be committed by the classis in no case to a committee. A committee is sometimes appointed to install a minister over a church. In general what is done by a committee under appointment by the body of which it is a part is done by the body. But ordination, it is said, "shall be conducted by the classis"; these words together with the supreme significance of the act itself are recognized as directing that the act shall be done only by classis in formal session, a quorum being present. It is to be added that irregularity in any details of the ordaining ceremony would not invalidate the ordination,

although a minister or classis officiating in irregular way would be liable to discipline.

A sermon must be preached and the liturgy must be used. There may be, but need not be, special charges given extra to those in the form.

There must be the laying on of hands. This is a scriptural act, preserved in the custom of the Christian Church through the centuries of its history. It is significant and impressive. In itself consists no passing of mysterious grace. It puts no undue emphasis on tactual succession. But it is a visible sign of the official blessing and consecrating of a life to the sacred office by those who themselves have already been set apart to it. Elders, members of the classis for the brief term of consistorial appointment, do not participate in the laying on of hands. The ministers alone fulfill this duty for the classis in the procedure laid down by the church, as especially qualified for it by their holding the office to which the candidate is now admitted. A certificate of ordination is to be given, signed by the president and stated clerk of classis, and it should be carefully kept; occasion or circumstance might arise when it would be important. The ordained minister is then enrolled as a member of the classis.

The classis should not set the ordination for the same day as the examination preliminary to it. The service of ordination is usually and quite properly at the same time as the service of installation when the occasion for ordaining is a call, accepted, from a church. Especially in this case, but also where ordination is not accompanied by installation, a congregation is expected and does assemble. If the examination is on the same day, immediately preceding, there is a plain assuming that the examination will be sustained. If it is not met satisfactorily, there is the definite pressure of an impending service and of an assembling congregation to give approval and proceed with the ordination. While a disapproving is very rare and is not to be anticipated, it ought possibly to be less rare than it is. In any case there should not be the apparent an-



nouncing by the classis that the examination is simply *pro forma*, that there is no thought of possible failure to sustain it. The first sentence of this provision might wisely have the words "has been held" in the place of "is held."

20. All ministers of the Gospel are bishops or overseers in the church; all are equal in rank and authority; and all are equal stewards of the mysteries of God.

Here is the principle of the so-called parity of the ministry, an outstanding principle of all churches of the presbyterial government, not of the papal or episcopal order. The assertion is briefly made that all ministers are equal in rank and authority. They are declared to be bishops or overseers, a declaration based upon understanding that as spoken of in the New Testament the bishop is not a different person from the preaching elder or minister. There is no office of the ministry superior to other office in the ministry. The professor of theology is not a higher order of the ministry. The president of a judicatory has only the passing powers of a brief presiding service; he has no rank or authority as a minister more than his fellows. All ministers have a certain sacred authority as stewards of the mysteries of God—of the Gospel of Grace in Christ Jesus.

21. The minister as an officer in the church is a member of his Classis and amenable solely thereto; as pastor, he shall *ipso facto* be a member of the church which he serves, or, when without charge, he may become a member of the church of his choice within the bounds of any Classis by the regular process of dismissal. Such minister may be a delegate to a Synod from the Classis of which he is a member, but shall not represent the consistory of the church of which he is a member in any ecclesiastical assembly or judicatory.

Ordination, the entrance of a candidate into this one of the four offices of the church, that of minister, having made him a member of the classis which ordained him, he is a minister amenable to it alone. As an individual, a confessing Christian, he was member of a local church; this membership was continued when he became a minister, the church giving him a letter of dismission to the church which he, ordained, first served; when he leaves the pas-

torate of one church to become pastor of another he becomes *ipso facto* member of this latter church, the relation to the former ceasing *ipso facto*. This is perfectly clear and involves no embarrassment. It would seem perhaps preferable for uniformity's sake that a letter of dismissal pass from church to church as it passed from the original church to the church of first service. Especially does this suggest itself in the light of the attaching provision that the minister if taking no pastorate, becoming without charge and given liberty to become a member of some church other than the one he last served, is to take a letter of dismissal the same as any other member. This church of his choice may be in the classis with which he has been connected or in any other classis. If in another classis he naturally asks dismissal to that also. Place of residence is not necessarily determining. If he does not ask a letter he remains member of the church he last served.

The question may arise whether the minister, amenable as an officer to the classis alone, is as a member of the church subject at all to the authority of its consistory, its elders. The matter has been already referred to. The orderly and naturally tenable understanding is that the elders have no official jurisdiction over the minister. This is sustained by reference to circumstance at the time of the introducing into the constitution of the provision for the minister's local church membership. That provision did not readily receive full assent. In finally proposing it the committee had it in mind to specifically guard against what was considered an unfortunate possibility by inserting words establishing the minister's amenability "solely" to the classis; the words, "as an officer," were perhaps not well chosen; they quite surely mean "because an officer."

"Such minister" apparently refers to the minister without charge. As a member of classis he may represent that body in a synod. A classis may resolve for itself to appoint at any time only ministers in the pastorate; this is lawful enough but hardly reasonable or wise. The minister without charge may not represent the consistory of the church of

which he is a member in either classis or synod. This provision seems to suggest a recognizing of what has come somewhat into practice, the choosing of a minister without charge as an elder in a local church. There appears to be no constitutional obstacle to this; and it may be much to the church's welfare.

22. Consistories of vacant congregations shall not invite or permit ministers of other denominations whose character and standing are not known to preach within their bounds, until satisfactory evidence of a recent date is exhibited in writing, to show their regular authority for that purpose and their good ministerial standing. Such Consistory shall consult in doubtful cases with the minister appointed as supervisor, *ad interim*.

"Vacant congregations" is not a happy phrasing. A church without pastor must necessarily make special arrangements for the supply of its pulpit. The consistory is in charge and naturally will find a minister or ministers of the denomination to serve until a pastor is secured; any such minister may be invited without prior formalities. Convenience, however, may strongly suggest service by a minister of other denomination; or such minister may be brought to consistory's attention by any one of many different circumstances. It is more than likely that a minister thus thought of and desired is of character and standing known to the consistory; in this instance also invitation or permission may be without prior formalities. If the character and standing are not known, the provision is very positive that the minister shall not be invited or permitted to preach until satisfactory evidence approving him is received; this evidence must be of recent date, in writing, and clear as to the man's authority to preach, his good ministerial standing. This provision is quite often and very unwisely ignored. Sometimes such an incident may be without any ill-result. Sometimes it may be an occasion of real discomfort and disadvantage. Sometimes it may lead to serious consequences for the church itself and for the denomination. Good impression may be made, more or less congregational desire and support may be aroused, and a question of call to the

pastorate may arise, even call and pastorate may follow, when the visitor's record and character make him unfit for the charge and of ill-promise for the church.

The documentary evidence therefore required surely is not, it may be added, all that a consistory should consider in the circumstance. There are often facts not in the documents, various considerations, deserving weight which should not be unknown to the consistory. It is right to be discreet, to seek really adequate knowledge of the man in point especially if there be any idea that he might be thought of as pastor, might think of himself in that connection. A consistory usually has available sources of immediate and trustworthy advice. In particular the supervisor, appointed by the classis for the church while without a pastor, is to be consulted in all doubtful cases. If a church is proceeding without formalities or adequate information or due care, it is for the supervisor in immediate and appropriate way to approach the situation and indicate to the consistory the right and wise procedure.

23. It shall be the duty of the Classis when any application is made for the admission of a candidate or minister from another denomination to subject him to such examination as shall enable it to proceed with freedom in his case.

A church may desire to give a call to a candidate (licentiate) or minister of another denomination. The differences between our own denomination and certain other denominations are not critical or vital; the fences are low; the calling of minister from one to another is not infrequent. A candidate or minister may desire to come from other denomination without having received a call, preferring, whether with or without charge, to have the new connection. The admission of a candidate by a classis, it will be remembered, means simply his being taken under its care; his membership is still simply of a local church; and this would naturally be transferred by letter of dismission to a church within the bounds of the classis. Application of a minister would naturally be in the form of a letter of dismission

from a presbytery or other corresponding body of the other denomination.

The classis must subject such applicant to some examination. It is not stated just what this examination shall be. It must simply be such that the results will enable the classis to proceed with freedom, that is in accordance with the constitution and with intelligence in admitting or rejecting. It is not necessarily in the field of doctrine as made clear in the next provision of the constitution. It is not usually in the field of academic studies; it may enter this field; it may seek assurance as to educational attainments and courses of theological instruction. It is very properly, if the prior record be unknown or if it be for any reason unusual, to inquire into the circumstance and experience in pastorates which may have been held. It may well inquire as to sympathy with the denomination, its government, institutions, and general enterprise, to be assured that there will be a sympathetic and loyal support of the whole organization.

It is primarily in point that the formal paper or papers presented be in order and adequate. If a letter of dismission is lacking, there is no ground whatever on which to proceed. If the letter of dismission is irregular in any way or fails to present with clearness the details desired, consideration may be entirely refused, or there may be a proceeding in part, pending the receipt of regular and adequate document; rarely if ever would there be an admitting on the basis of document at all irregular; yet there might be some circumstance which would justify the overlooking of some irregularity in form when the substance in point was clear and satisfactory. Ordination might be for some reason inquired into, but stated in or plainly underlying the document in regular form it is quite invariably recognized as valid, subjected to no question.

Ordination is not to be repeated. The usual acceptance of ordination of other church bodies as valid is not confined to Protestant bodies; it applies also to the Roman Catholic. A priest, surely without letter of dismission, who might



wish to make the change of church and ministry would not need to be re-ordained, in the general view should not be. Nearly a century ago, 1835 (403), the question was before General Synod; by a close vote it resolved "that the question of the validity of Roman Catholic ordination be left to the different classes." This was right since admission and ordination of ministers are prerogatives of the classis. Perhaps no classis now would refuse to consider it valid; probably any favor toward re-ordination has now quite disappeared. If a Roman Catholic priest, becoming a Protestant minister, should insistently desire new ordination, perhaps no classis would refuse it.

It is competent for a classis to decline to receive a minister whose application is before it for any reason sufficient in its judgment, however regular the papers may be.

24. A Classis shall not receive any candidate or minister under its care from any body of professing Christians which maintains doctrines differing from the Standards of the Reformed Church in America, without a complete and explicit declaration in writing on his part, that he renounces such doctrines as are contrary to the Word of God and to such Standards.

The necessity of satisfying the classis as to matters of doctrine is specified in connection with a minister coming from certain denominations. Bodies maintaining doctrines differing from the standards of the Reformed Church in America are mentioned. Just which these bodies are is not stated. Virtually every other denomination has words in some symbol which are not in full agreement with certain words in our symbols. Several denominations are in such fine agreement in the substance of the symbols severally possessed that the exact requirement of this provision of the constitution is not generally regarded as in point. Naturally there will be some questioning as to some points of belief and satisfaction will be expected. The signing of the formula, which is necessary on admission, in any case formally attests agreement with our standards. Other denomination, however, is in such clear disagreement with some important tenet of our church, having a different view so dominantly

characteristic of it, that a minister from it must meet the situation a little more specifically. He must make a clear and explicit declaration in writing that he has given up or does give up such doctrines as are contrary to our church beliefs. This is reasonable and right. There has been a definite and mature affiliation with the different doctrine; there must have been a definite and clear change of belief; the classis for the preservation in its pulpits of the church's characteristic understanding of the Word of God, of the Christian faith, should have on record clear assurance of the sincere and full accepting of this new conviction.

The classis itself must decide whether the particular denomination concerned, when an individual case presents itself, is or is not of characteristically different doctrine.

25. Every minister must explain to his congregation at an ordinary service on the Lord's Day the points of doctrine contained in the Heidelberg Catechism, so that the exposition may be completed within the term of four years.

The requirement concerning the Heidelberg Catechism is expressed in these words by recent amendment. The former wording required the explaining of the Heidelberg Catechism; the present wording requires an explaining of the points of doctrine contained in the Heidelberg Catechism. The difference may seem small, quite immaterial; it meets, however, one aspect of past time objection; it is not the catechism that as such must be the pulpit subject and discussion but the doctrines contained in it—that is, let us say, the Word of God at points where it becomes the church's, the catechism's, specific teaching. Only two items of particular requirement are set forth: that the explanation be at an ordinary service on the Lord's Day, and that the explanation be completed within four years.

The importance of this matter is so definite in the procedure of the church that it is expressly included among the few details stated in the required form of call presented to a minister by a church. The custom has always been characteristic. Its value has been proven and is very apparent. It insures the impressing upon the people of all the

congregations of the large outstanding truths of revelation amid the many lesser lessons of Scripture that call for treatment and amid passing and very secondary subjects that so often have place in the pulpit. It makes the people intelligent in their adherence to the truths. It is an aid to the minister in choosing, finding chosen for him, a big subject at occasional or set times, a given subject of the first rank once a month. The points of doctrine contained in the Heidelberg Catechism are such as ought never to be omitted in the program of the pulpit, whether there were the catechism requirement or not. The catechism is in substance the Ten Commandments and Summary of the Law, the Apostles' Creed, the Lord's Prayer, and the Sacraments.

Objections to this requirement of the church have been more or less prevalent. It has been said that it compels too much doctrinal teaching; it is plain, however, that there should be some doctrinal preaching; it is plain also that the points in the catechism, as above stated, not only admit of but compel the most practical preaching. It has been said that it is an unsuitable obligation to put upon the freedom of the pulpit in its choice of texts and subjects, that it is unfairly confining and directive where personal choice and conscience should wholly rule; it is plain, however, that in proportion to the free choice of texts and subjects this obligation is very small, that at the same time it asks nothing that is not natural in the program of the pulpit, and that the church, entrusting its ministers with the stewardship of the gospel, in its constitution very properly should have the privilege of emphasizing through its ministers the truths which stand as peculiarly the platform of belief on which the denomination—and presumably the whole church—stands.

Difficulties that have sometimes seemed to be in the way quite disappear when the matter is reasonably and accurately considered. The new wording of the constitution seems to allow an omitting of the words of the catechism if the omitting of them seem to be desirable, though the reading of them is the natural procedure and generally to be

commended. More than one Lord's Day may be united as the field of one explanation or sermon; in fact this directly suggests itself in certain instances; on the other hand more than one explanation or sermon may be upon the field of one Lord's Day. The choice of one Sunday a month for this pulpit address, thus systematically completing the order in four years, is an excellent plan, but it is not at all imperative; several Sundays in succession may be thus used, and then many Sundays pass without such use; a series on the Commandments or on the Lord's Prayer quite consecutive may be an admirable program. The treatment may be topical or it may be the exposition, exegetical, of a text. It may even be a very direct and brief explanation of the Lord's Day or of part of it or of more than one, apart from and not displacing the sermon of the day. After a four years' discussion of the field, the beginning of a second course of discussion may be with a different congregation or it may be with the same congregation; in any case there is ample opportunity to avoid repetition, to present new material; a new text, a new angle for the treating of the subject, means fresh interest for the minister at least.

Wisdom and interest on the part of the minister can quite surely make the obedience to this law of the church a well-approved procedure. Under this law and the contract item in his call the minister is not justified in omitting attention to it. The General Synod has never undertaken to define the specific way in which each minister shall fulfill the obligation; in 1892 it resolved "that this whole matter of expounding the catechism and catechizing the youth of the church must be left to the conscience of the pastor and judgment of the church he serves and of the classis to which he belongs."

26. A minister who is no longer capable of performing the duties of the ministry by reason of old age or continued infirmity of mind or body, or for other satisfactory reasons, may upon application duly supported be declared Emeritus by the Classis. Such minister, however, shall retain the character, rank and title which he possessed before. If made pastor emeritus by request of the congregation which he has served, he shall be entitled to

such annuities or retiring pension from the congregation as the Classis, in view of all the circumstances, shall deem proper. This arrangement shall be at any time subject to modification or discontinuance by the Classis.

A minister may be declared emeritus only by formal act of the classis; it is not an action of a local church. The action may be taken on application for it duly supported. The application may come from the church which the minister is serving, its consistory, or it may come from the minister himself. Its support would naturally be in written or oral statements giving the reasons for the desired action, showing the apparent propriety of it. The general reason in point is that he is no longer capable of performing the duties of the ministry; this may be by reason of old age or of continued infirmity of body or mind. Wide latitude of possible occasion, however, is admitted in the words, "or other satisfactory reasons." Personal or church circumstances of one sort or another beyond the two or three specified may justify the application and the granting of it. The words, "no longer capable of performing the duties of the ministry," seem to have no very limited meaning. A classis might perhaps consider that, even when years are not far advanced and there is little infirmity of mind or body, when ability in the usual sense to perform the duties of the ministry is not lost, nevertheless there is an incapacity to acceptably fulfill the duties in the church which has been served, and that the emeritus position is justified by the situation fully understood. The classis is the judge of the reasons, whether adequate or not, within the bounds of the constitution. The action is ordinarily the approving of desire on the part of both church and minister that after long service together, when the active service seems necessarily at an end and no other charge is to be accepted by the minister, the life together shall continue, the bond of respect, gratitude and affection shall have still an official standing.

The emeritus minister retains "character, rank, and title" before possessed. This means that he is still a minister, that he is not retired from that office, that he is therefore



still a member of the classis; his membership in the local church is also still continued. He is not at all deprived of ministerial functions but he is relieved from these as an obligation to the local church. He is to be no longer president of the consistory; he is not to be in the consistory, composed of elders and deacons and minister actively in office. He may serve in such occasional or even stated way as may be agreeable to the church and to him—preaching sometimes, visiting somewhere, even attending consistory on occasion to give advice or help. It is a position calling for utmost tact, good judgment, and good will. The relations between emeritus minister and active minister may be very trying and even unhappy when wisdom or good will is lacking in either one. It ought to be an exceedingly happy and mutually helpful relation; and it generally is.

If retired, made emeritus, by his own request, the minister has no positive claim to annuity or pension; it may be given him by the congregation, however, and no doubt ordinarily would be given. If made emeritus by request of the congregation he is entitled to an annuity or pension. This usually would not be claimed by him; it would be the gracious arrangement of the church. But the classis is in this instance in specified authority, is in position to make sure that a grant is made and that it is appropriate. The proposal of a church, attaching with the emeritus application, may appear at once to be what it ought to be, fair or generous; if it does not appear so, there will naturally be conference between classis and consistory, their representatives, to accomplish an amended proposal. The classis may refuse to declare emeritus and refuse to dissolve the pastoral relation if satisfactory arrangement is not undertaken. Sometimes even when there is title to annuity or pension, the absence of all such arrangement is agreeable to all concerned, classis, minister, and church. Classis may modify or discontinue an approved financial arrangement at any time; changed circumstance of either minister or church might make this proper and wise. The general Pension Fund of the denomination has bearing upon the whole matter.

The question arises whether a classis could end the emeritus status and relation of a minister. No doubt it could. Some new condition must have arisen to justify return to active pastorate, or to the non-emeritus status of minister without charge.

The word, congregation, occurring here, is nowhere distinctly defined. It occurs also in sections 41, 60, 63, and 98. Is the congregation in its meaning equivalent to or different from the church? In the system and government of the Presbyterian Church the two bodies are technically distinct. Communicant members, with their baptized children, "constitute the church." "A congregation [is] composed of the members of the church and others who attend its services and contribute to its support. The congregation calls the pastor and fixes his salary. It also chooses trustees to hold the property of the church and to manage its temporalities. . . . Trustees represent, in its civil relationships, the whole congregation, including those not yet church members. . . . The congregation, moreover, as represented by its trustees, is a corporation organized under the law of the State." A "congregational" emphasis and entity are here apparent which the Reformed Church in America does not know. It is not apparent that in the constitution of the Reformed Church the word, congregation, has any other technical or formal meaning than that which the word, church, has. If specific interpretation must be pressed at any one of the sections where it occurs, this understanding can unquestionably be maintained without doing violence to any good order or to the rights of any groups or individual.

At the same time there does prevail a popular understanding of the word, congregation, a practical use of it, deserving no rebuke and virtually necessary in constant procedure. It is commonly used to describe the body variously composed—of members of the church and their families, and of financial supporters, workers, and attendants who are not members of the church. It may perhaps be added that an allowing of this meaning at the several places in the constitution where the word occurs would involve no embarrassment.

## ARTICLE III

### OF PROFESSORS OF THEOLOGY

SECTION 30. Only such persons shall be appointed to the office of Professors of Theology as are ministers in good standing. Professors of Theology must be sound in the faith, and possessed of ability to teach, and must have the confidence of the churches. They shall be chosen and appointed by a vote of three-fourths of the members present in the General Synod.

Professor of theology as an office of the church means professor in any branch of theological science, professor in any department of a theological school. In ordinary reference the words have denoted the professor of systematic theology. Only a person who holds the first office, that of minister of the Word, is eligible for appointment to the office of professor. This is not so in the Netherlands; there a layman may be appointed. Articles of the Synod of Dort so provide. The Explanatory Articles here in 1792 do not so provide. A layman may be well qualified for the duties; his appointment may seem very desirable; the Church in America, however, requires that ordination as a minister precede; this could be accomplished after the giving of time to usual preparation or through the granting of a dispensation. Such incident has not occurred in our nearly century and a half of theological appointments. A layman may be used in the staff of instruction of a theological seminary by appointment under title different and presumably of lower rank than that of professor.

The soundness in the faith required in one to be appointed should be apparent in the known record and utterances of the person under consideration; it is definitely set forth and assured in the signing of the required formula. The ability to teach required may have been apparent in

teaching service already rendered somewhere, or in the temperament and influence of the person generally known, or in the special teaching quality of his official ministry. The confidence of the churches required may be the result of wide and familiar acquaintance; or it may be established by information and assurances given to and satisfying the representatives of the churches. It is to be anticipated that these initial considerations in the appointment will be confirmed as time passes. Soundness in the faith, not lessening, will consist with intellectual alertness, vital scholarship, and forward thinking. Ability to teach ought to gain with continuing experience rather than lose by reason of incessant routine. The confidence of the churches may well deepen, become more personally felt, through growing acquaintance with the professor's work. If these things do not maintain, if they really and pronouncedly fail, there is occasion for attention by the General Synod, the maker of the appointment.

The expression of the initial confidence of the churches is called for by the three-fourths vote of General Synod required. A majority is not enough; a two-thirds vote is not enough. That there should be unanimous preference for one person could not be expected; that there should be unanimous confidence in every way could hardly be expected; but a three-fourths vote surely expresses the confidence and preference of the churches in adequate degree. The importance of this large initial favor lies plainly in the fact that the professors so definitely represent the churches, that students are to be sent to them by the churches, and that the students instructed by them are to come to the pulpits and pastorates of the churches. Objection may be made, however, that the rule may compel a compromise, choice of a man less qualified than one from whom very prevailing personal favor is absent.

Question may arise as to the phrase, "members present in the General Synod," its meaning. It cannot be held that this means all the members enrolled in an annual session of the synod; most members are registered on the first day;

some on later days; some members leave on early days of the session; all members are perhaps never present at any one day's session. The members present, not the members enrolled, are in point. The members present are fairly assumed to be those who vote. Three-fourths of the votes cast in a ballot are fairly assumed to be a three-fourths vote of those present; blank ballots would need to be counted since they represent members present. Should this situation be called in question by any member of the synod, statement made that there are more present in the synod than have voted, this would compel a determining count. The "bar of the house," too often a mere fiction, would be enforced. All not members of the synod would be directed outside the bar; all inside the bar, accredited members, would be counted; and the vote must be three-fourths of this total number of those "present in the General Synod." That members present include those not voting was decided in relation to a classis in case of final appeal before General Synod in 1878 (103).

The electing of professor of theology by the General Synod at all has been much criticised—especially in the past. Usually a professor in an institution of learning would not wisely be elected by a large representative body of men not intimately familiar with the field of learning or with the man. When through the years the General Synod elected in that way, without prior nomination, it was singularly fortunate in the issue generally reached; but it was a method not wholly defensible and one destined to change sometime. The modifying of the method by the assigning to the classes of the privilege of making nomination to the synod was an improvement perhaps, but it was not a remedy and did not last long. The method now maintaining of nomination to the General Synod by the Board of Superintendents, that board presumably guided in its nomination by a competent committee of its members, is virtually equivalent to the usual excellent way of choosing professors in higher institutions of learning. With nomination thus



made, election by the General Synod is perhaps an excellent thing for the several reasons already recited.

31. A Professor of Theology shall be elected by the General Synod after nomination has been made by the Board of Superintendents of the Seminary for which he is to be chosen. The president of the General Synod shall notify the stated clerk of the Synod and through him the stated clerk of the Board of Superintendents when a Professor is to be nominated. The stated clerk of the Board of Superintendents shall then give due notice to every member of that Board that a nomination is to be made. The Board shall then by a two-thirds vote of its members nominate to the Synod the candidate whom it shall deem best qualified for the professorial chair to be filled. Such nomination duly made is to be certified by the stated clerk of the Board of Superintendents to the stated clerk of the General Synod at least ten days before the meeting of the Synod. A nominating ballot for additional candidates may be ordered by a majority vote of the General Synod and every person receiving not less than one-fourth of the votes cast shall be considered in nomination. No election of a Professor of Theology shall ever be held on the same day on which the nomination is made.

The occasion for the election of a professor is a vacancy in a professorial position through the resignation or death of an incumbent or the creating of a new chair by the General Synod. A nomination by the Board of Superintendents must precede an election. The procedure in point starts with the president of the synod, and follows course clearly defined. The two-thirds vote in the Board of Superintendents necessary to make nomination is defined as a "two-thirds vote of its members." The question may arise whether this means two-thirds of the members voting or two-thirds of all the members of the board. The question of "members present" does not arise as in reference to the General Synod in its electing. While there is weight in maintaining that "its members" means all the members, there is greater weight in the contention that "vote of its members" means vote cast by its members, that therefore it is two-thirds of this cast vote in meeting of the board that is in point. It is to be observed that notice must be sent to every member, a meeting being called, that a nomination is to be made.

The person to be nominated is to be the one thought

"best qualified." Personal preference must not have determining weight. Qualification for the duties of the chair concerned is the test. The nominee is not necessarily at the time a minister of the Reformed Church in America; if not, and if elected, he must become a member of the church before or at his inducting into office. There have been several elections of men of other churches. Members of the board, formally a committee or not, give themselves to careful and wide inquiry as to those who might properly be considered and as to the one most worthy of their choice.

It is not stated that the nomination, while to be certified to the stated clerk of the General Synod ten days in advance, is to be made known to the members of the synod prior to its convening. This is usual, perhaps inevitable, and certainly advisable. The word readily and quickly circulates; it naturally appears in the church periodicals; it might be sent directly to each member of the synod. It is fair that each should surely know who will be named to him for his approving vote.

The way is not closed for the synod to make other choice if it thinks wise. No one can be elected without nomination, however; and a nominating ballot cannot be had save by express directing of the synod. If no motion is made for such a ballot the vote proceeds on the one name presented. If motion is made that a nominating ballot be had and a majority votes for it, such ballot proceeds. Ordinarily the synod is by majority or even unanimously against it. It is not wise policy to add names unless there be very plain and excellent reasons. If the nominating ballot is taken, it is entirely open without stating of names on the floor. Everyone receiving as many as one-fourth of the votes cast is in nomination; if no one receives that number, no new nomination is made. Some members who favor the person named by the Board of Superintendents may cast a nominating ballot for someone else, wishing their second choice to be available if for any reason the three-fourths vote for the Board of Superintendents' nominee cannot be secured. They would vote for the man's nomination but at electing

ballot would vote for the man originally named. Ordinarily the member favoring the original nominee would vote blank on the nominating ballot which the majority have made necessary.

Electing ballot shall not be on day of nomination, day of the presenting of the original name or of the naming of others.

32. The General Synod having appointed a day for the election of a Professor or Professors of Theology shall proceed to the election from those nominated. No additional nominations shall be made after the balloting is begun and no nominations shall be set aside until an election has been effected. After the election has been completed by the choice of a three-fourths vote, the president of the Synod in the presence of that body shall execute an instrument certifying that the person has been duly elected and specifying the general duties of his office. This instrument shall be signed in the presence of the General Synod. A Professor-elect, at his installation and before signing the formula, shall present a letter of dismissal to the General Synod from the Classis with which he has been connected.

The procedure of election is clear in its details: the formal appointing of a day, the excluding of all nominations after election balloting is begun, the retaining of every nomination during all election balloting. The wisdom of the retaining in nomination of even a name of least nominating votes is apparent in the fact that it might finally appear that no one of initial larger vote was able to receive the required three-fourths vote, while the one of less or least vote might have so much favor as second choice among the members that in the end he would receive the three-fourths vote which no one else of early larger vote could command. Ordinarily it is to be assumed that, if choice of the nominee of the Board of Superintendents and of any other quite surely qualified man fail, there will be no insisting upon an election but a return of the problem to the Board of Superintendents for new nomination. It can be conceived that argument be set forth that the words "until an election has been effected" compels a continuance without power of declaring an end and a new start at later convening. This seems unreasonable; the General Synod in

any session should be of power to determine whether or not it shall elect. If more ballots than one are necessary, they may be taken on the same day as the first; or only a single ballot each day, day after day, may be taken.

After election, word is usually sent at once to the person and his presence at the synod is secured if possible. It is to advantage if, disposed to accept and personally appearing, he is able to take part in ceremony immediate and impressive. The president of the synod must sign in its presence the instrument declaring the choice of the church and the duties of the office. Signing it while the synod stands, he may deliver it at once to the elected professor who in his turn may address to the synod a few words of acceptance while the synod still stands. If the person elected is unable to be present, he may send word of acceptance; it is desirable that the synod have it at once if possible. There may be no immediate decision, accepting or declining. If a declining of the election should be immediately received, question might arise whether the synod could resume balloting and make another choice. This might be in order if the person nominated by the Board of Superintendents had not been the one elected, or if, he having been the one elected, other nominations had been made in the synod. If, however, the person named by the superintendents had been the one elected and if there had been no other nominations made, and perhaps in any case, the orderly procedure would be, omitting further ballot or election, to look to the Board of Superintendents for new nomination at later time.

A ceremony of installation is referred to; there are no directions concerning it save that the formula is then signed and letter of dismission to the General Synod received; it is usually called the inauguration of a professor. The president of the General Synod usually presides, a charge to the professor is given, and an inaugural address by him is pronounced. The letter would usually be from a classis of the church, the classis of which the Reformed Church minister was a member; it might be from a presbytery of the Presbyterian Church, or from like body of some other denomina-

tion. The professor passes then from the oversight and discipline of the classis, is no longer a member of it. He is now under the oversight and discipline of the General Synod.

The question may arise whether the membership of the professor in his local church is affected. He has been *ipso facto* member of the church of which he was pastor. When without charge he would remain a member of it or ask dismission to a church of his choice. When, without charge he has become a professor, this plainly still applies. He remains a member of the church he served or asks a letter of dismission naturally to the church of the place of his new residence and professorial work. The General Synod has been substituted for the classis, not for the local church. A professor appointed to the office in time past when the minister was not a member of a local church, is now naturally related to the new procedure and naturally, at his request, would be received as a member of the church of his choice without formality of letter of dismission.

33. Every Professor of Theology shall subscribe to the following formula before he enters on the duties of his office.

We, the underwritten, in becoming Professors of Theology in the Reformed Church in America, do by this our subscription sincerely and in good conscience before the Lord declare that we believe the Gospel of the Grace of God in Christ Jesus as revealed in the Holy Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments and as set forth in the Standards of the Reformed Church in America. We believe that these Standards agree with the Word of God, and we reject all errors which are contrary thereto. We promise that we will diligently teach and faithfully defend the doctrines contained in the said Standards and that we will not inculcate or write either publicly or privately, directly or indirectly, anything against the same, and that we will exert ourselves to keep the Church free from such errors.

Should it happen that any objections against the doctrines in the Standards of the Church arise in our minds, we promise that we will not either publicly or privately propose, teach or defend the same by preaching or writing until we have first fully revealed such objections to the General Synod, to whom we are responsible, that our opinions may receive a thorough examination in that body. We hold ourselves ready always to submit to the judgment of the General Synod, under penalty of censure or



deposition from our office in case of refusal, reserving to ourselves the right for a rehearing or a new trial in case we conceive ourselves aggrieved by the sentence of the Synod, without disturbing the peace of the Church pending such trial. We promise furthermore to be always willing and ready to comply with any demand from the General Synod for a more particular explanation of our sentiments respecting any article in the Standards.

The formula which must be subscribed by the professor of theology is in substance much the same as that signed by candidates and that signed by ministers. It includes some additions or developed wordings, especially the direct statement that "we believe that these Standards agree with the Word of God, and we reject all errors contrary thereto." It reasserts the promise to teach and defend "the doctrines contained in the said Standards," to set forth nothing contrary and to preserve the church from error as may be possible. It states the purpose to place before the General Synod any objections possibly arising in the mind, to submit to the synod's judgment, the case being subject to later review, and not to disturb the church's peace pending the trial. It promises readiness to explain the attitude toward any article of the standards, should synod wish it.

The same comments are in point as were in point touching the other formulae. Sincerity, genuine conviction, is first of all in point. Definite and adequate maintaining of the church's beliefs while maintaining the right and duty of intellectual independence and of individual and advancing interpretation of the revelation of God is essential. Substance and spirit are to be supremely stressed. Small objections or doubts in initial stage are hardly to be at once brought to the synod; to claim synod's attention, they should be substantial, virtually confirmed, of a nature where silence as to them in the classroom or pulpit or elsewhere cannot be honestly maintained. An incident of the asking by synod of explanation from a professor occurred nearly a century ago; a sermon was called in question as perhaps not doctrinally sound; while approval of the sermon was not expressed, the professor's explanation was accepted as satisfactory and action went no further. Sixty

years later a book by a retired professor was questioned by some in the synod, but, it at once appearing that the author was then under care of classis not of synod, the matter was not given further attention.

34. A Professor while in office shall not take pastoral charge of any congregation; but he may preach and administer or assist in administering the Sacraments in any church as a minister of the Gospel on request of the minister or Consistory of said Church.

The requirement that a professor in office shall not take pastoral charge of any congregation means, technically, that he shall not be the installed minister of any church. The reason is practical; pastoral duties would probably interfere with the adequate performing of the professorial duties; the rule therefore might fairly be applied to the undertaking of pastoral duties even though there be no official induction as pastor. A case might arise, however, where a rigid applying of the rule against some unofficial pastoral service by a professor would be unreasonable and unfortunate.

The right to preach and to serve at the sacraments is given. The preaching by professors in the churches often greatly serves the welfare of the churches, it increases the familiar acquaintance of the people with their professors, and it is an element in the constant equipping of the professor to do his work with the students whose chief work after graduation will be preaching. Service either of preaching or of the sacraments would be, as definitely stated, at the request of a minister, pastor of a church, or of a consistory, the church being with or without a pastor at the time.

The rule against pastoral charge for a professor was not originally characteristic of the church. Dr. Livingston, the first professor of theology, continued a minister of the Collegiate Church, New York City, for nearly twenty-five years of his time as professor. The articles of 1792 permitted it. In 1819 (39) the General Synod declared against it. It is not absolutely sure that the complete inhibition is a wise one. It represents a principle so generally right and wise in its application that, for the preserving of best general pro-

cedure, the rule may be necessary. Circumstance might suggest a very happy double situation, the professor serving well both his professorial office and a church more or less closely related. Under the existing requirement such combined work at least could be in special case maintained by the pastor of a church holding position in teaching staff under other title than that of professor.

In the Presbyterian Church and in most seminaries this restriction does not maintain.

35. The Professors of Theology in each of the theological schools of the Church shall have power to appoint one of their number a delegate to the General Synod.

The right of the professors in a theological school to be represented by a delegate in the General Synod is of recent date. Even now it is a power to be exercised at their option. They have power to appoint; it is not said that they shall appoint. Until recently the professor, removed from membership in a classis and, like all ministers without local church membership, amenable to Synod, was quite without membership status in any ecclesiastical body. Now he has the local church membership and he may have delegate membership in the General Synod. The constitution, 1792 (2), provided that a professor could not be a delegate unless also a pastor. The constitution, 1833, formulating a resolution of 1819, and the constitution, 1874, provided that a professor should not sit as member of any ecclesiastical assembly or judicatory. In more recent years the General Synod by resolution invited each seminary to send to the synod's annual session a representative to sit in the session and to represent the seminary in a non-delegate way; such representative was not a member of the synod, had no voting privilege. In 1916 the full voting delegate was provided for.

While the present procedure may be excellent from the practical standpoint, question may arise whether it is strictly consistent with our basic church order. The constituting of each of the church's higher assemblies is in principle from the lower assemblies and in the person of ministers and

elders as such. The classis is of ministers and elders from churches, consistories. The Particular Synod is of ministers and elders from the classes. The General Synod is of ministers and elders from the classes and Particular Synods. The only exception is the delegate, perhaps two or three delegates, from the seminary or seminaries of the church—not a constituent assembly. In answer to this it may be said, however, that the professor of theology is a distinct office in our church order, named with the three others, the minister, the elder, and the deacon.

36. A Professor of Theology shall always be amenable to the General Synod. He shall continue in office until his death or until the acceptance of his voluntary resignation, or until he reaches the age of seventy years, when he shall be declared Professor Emeritus, unless he shall be declared incapacitated by the General Synod because of permanent disability or shall be removed from office by due process and trial for unsoundness in the faith or for such misbehavior as shall be deemed a violation of the obligations entered into at his appointment.

The professor of theology, dismissed to the General Synod, is always amenable to it. The question may arise, as in the case of the minister, whether he is in any degree amenable to the local church of which he is a member; and the answer is the same, that the intent of the constitution is to remove him from the local jurisdiction. Any trial or discipline on ground of doctrine or conduct would be the province of General Synod alone.

The appointment of a professor is without fixed term, virtually for life. The terminating of it is for one or another specific cause here fully recited. The professor serves until his death save as one of these stated contingencies arises. He may voluntarily resign and the General Synod accept his resignation; one or another of many reasons may lead him to resign; he may wish to return to the pastorate; such resignations are not unknown in the record. He may be declared incapacitated by the General Synod because of permanent disability; this disability may be physical or it may be mental. He may be removed by the General Synod for unsoundness in the faith or for misbehavior; such re-

removal can be only by due process and trial. He must retire at the age of seventy; this is a recent amending, 1920, of the constitution, 1916.

Is there any more general authority resident in the General Synod for the terminating of a professor's appointment to office? Perhaps the work may become unsatisfactory, inefficient. Perhaps qualities of disposition, of personality, may become detrimental to the life and service of a seminary. Possibly the General Synod would be justified and sustained in terminating the connection on grounds not exactly specified in this article. It is plain, however, that a resignation if obtainable is by far the best meeting of any such situation; and some patient seeking and waiting for that would be in point. It may be added also that the "declaring incapacitated," recited as one of the specific terminatings of service, would generally and happily be made unnecessary by the entirely voluntary resignation of the one incapacitated.

37. A Professor of Theology shall be at liberty to resign his office only with the consent of the General Synod or on three months' previous notice of his intention to the president of that body. Should this resignation on becoming effective make it necessary for the Board of Superintendents to make temporary arrangements, the president of General Synod shall at once notify the president of the Board of Superintendents of this fact. When a Professor's resignation is accepted he shall receive a certificate of dismissal from the General Synod to such Church and Classis as he may choose, unless he is made Professor Emeritus. If he fails to ask for such certificate of dismissal, the stated clerk of Synod shall dismiss him to the ecclesiastical body from which he came.

The voluntary resignation of a professor is properly preceded by notice of intention to resign given three months before to the president of the General Synod. This is to make possible adequate arrangements looking to the choice of a successor. A resignation at time of General Synod's convening without prior intimation of it would find the synod in no position to make appointment before the opening of the new seminary year without the holding of a special session. Temporary arrangements for the work would be necessary. Liberty to waive this three months' notice



to the president, to waive that length of time or waive notice altogether, is provided. "With the consent of the General Synod" the professor may resign without having given previous notice. It might easily happen that desire and decision to resign first appear near the time of synod's session; the synod normally would not refuse consent and compel the wait of a year before the resignation could be received and accepted and the responsibilities of the work surrendered. Circumstance might arise, however, wherefor the synod would feel itself justified in enforcing the three months' requirement, feel compelled to do so.

A resignation would become effective at the moment of its acceptance or on a date specified in the resignation or in the resolution of acceptance. The starting at once of any procedure necessary to proper care of the work in point is directed, a notifying if necessary of the president of the Board of Superintendents by the president of the General Synod. This notifying and a meeting of the board might be necessary or expedient before the date when the resignation becomes effective, perhaps even before the General Synod has been able to receive the formal resignation.

The provision that a professor, when his resignation is received and if he is not made emeritus, shall receive from the General Synod a certificate of dismissal from the synod to the church and classis of his choice does not appear wholly consistent with the situation in point. The mention of church seems to suggest that no local church membership has been maintaining. But, as we have seen, there was no ceasing of such membership when the minister became a professor. Had it ceased, it might have been by way of letter of dismissal from the church to the General Synod as there was a letter of dismissal from the classis to the synod. No such letter was either provided for in procedure or actually given. There is no conclusion possible save that the word, church, has no place in this section, that the dismissal is simply from the General Synod to a classis, presumably the classis in which is the church of local membership, unless this local membership is at the same time to

be transferred into the bounds of another classis. If on the other hand the word, church, be held as properly used, local church membership be regarded as not at the moment maintaining, then the constitution has failed to provide earlier adequate procedure.

If the professor is made emeritus, then no letter of dismission passes; he remains under the care of the General Synod, amenable to it. The status in detail of the professor emeritus is not defined. It is analogous to the status of a minister emeritus, no longer active pastor, in his classis. No reference is made to annuity or pension which, however, the General Synod or the seminary itself may provide if appropriate.

If a retiring professor does not ask certificate of dismission from the General Synod, he must nevertheless pass from its care and jurisdiction; the stated clerk, of his own motion, gives him letter of dismission to the ecclesiastical body from which he came, that is presumably a classis of the church; it might be a presbytery or similar body of other denomination. This unlikely situation might not be wholly without embarrassment.

## ARTICLE IV

### OF THE ELDERS AND DEACONS

SECTION 40. The office of the elders is together with the ministers of the Word to take the oversight of the church which is committed to them and diligently to look whether everyone behaves worthily of the Christian profession; to have regard to the teaching and conduct of the ministers of the Word and of their fellow officers; to prevent the Sacraments from being profaned; in connection with the ministers to pass upon the fitness of those who desire to make public confession of faith; to act according to Christian discipline against those who walk disorderly and to receive the penitent again into the bosom of the church; to assist in performing visitations and in general to have charge of all matters which relate to the welfare and good order of the church and to be assistant to the ministers of the Word with their good counsel.

The extended defining of the office of elder is quite wholly an emphasis upon it as an oversight of and activity in spiritual affairs. There is a duty of regard to the preaching and life of the minister; a captious or over-critical attitude is most unfortunate but to be "assistant with good counsel" is high service. Ordinarily and habitually a cordial and appreciative and encouraging word is in point; the old custom of elders sitting in the church at the right of the minister, deacons at his left, and shaking his hand at the close of the service as if in approval of the sermon preached had much to commend it. Some time there may be an incident or a sequence of preaching that seems to be prejudicial to the characteristic beliefs of the church or to the religious spirit and life of the members and it becomes the duty of the elders, unpleasant as it may be, in way frank but wise to talk with the minister about it and even to become more positive in action if the hurt to the church continues. If there arise any offence in the life or conduct of

the minister, the duty of the elders is even more pressing to take up the matter with the minister, perhaps with others, to effect as speedy as possible a correcting of the situation and avoidance if possible of different and more disagreeable dealing with the situation by higher judicatory or by other than those in spiritual authority. A further field of varied duty is that of the church membership. The elders, with the minister, receive members into the church, hear confession of faith, and examine into personal fitness for welcome at the Lord's Supper. That this function belongs exclusively to the elders, with minister, sometimes is not recognized or is ignored. A church occasionally is found that associates the deacons in this work, that acts upon admission of members in full consistory; this probably arises in some degree from the prevailing use in past times of the word, consistory, as applying to the elders alone; some confusion thus arose and may somewhere continue. The understanding should be clear everywhere that the deacons do not share, the full consistory does not act, in this matter. Associated with this work of admitting members is the duty of Christian discipline related to those who are members of the church, the duty of "preventing the sacraments from being profaned." Positive discipline in the church, the suspension from the privilege of the Lord's Supper, even "fencing the table," is not much exercised in these latter days. This may be right and wise; but the church requires that the matter always be in mind; it requires that a question as to communicants' life and conduct be asked in the elders' session before each communion; and there are limits of charity which the elders of every church ought to recognize, some circumstances which demand that the elders keep someone from the table. Rarely does anyone grossly unfit, known to be so, attempt to come; of his own will he stays away, and the elders have only to consider whether there shall be a formal vote of suspension or other discipline. That the elders should be active in seeking to revive the spiritual experience and renew the consistent conduct by rebuking, persuading, encouraging, restoring is

very clear; that such work should be done more personally, more constantly, more completely than it usually is done cannot be questioned. The invitation to the Lord's Supper, to church membership, is more the need of today, no doubt, than warning from it. Visitation too is mentioned, not very widely or definitely fulfilled perhaps. Every elder naturally should be alert for opportunity to serve in the church's behalf by visit to one home or another. Some churches divide congregation or territory into districts, assigning them to the several elders. The home evangelism movement, home visitation, is directed to the special forwarding of the gospel and of the church by systematic visiting of the homes with which any church ought faithfully to concern itself. Such work of visiting, to be shared in by all willing and qualified laymen, naturally is sponsored first of all by the elders.

The large and general spiritual responsibility of the elders is well summed up as related to all matters of the church's welfare and good order. The elders should always keep their own separate minutes.

41. The office of the deacons is to collect and administer the benevolent contributions of the congregation and to take charge of the alms and other gifts bestowed for the use of the poor; to distribute such alms with wisdom and prudence and to visit and comfort the distressed.

The office of the deacon as here defined appears to be quite limited in scope. In accord with the New Testament defining of it, its scope is essentially attention to the poor; the deacons are to receive and to bestow the church's contributions for the poor, the poor in the membership of the church first of all, the poor in some less intimate relation perhaps; they are to do this wisely and with all possible comforting service. The occasion for this particular service is never wholly absent; "ye have the poor always with you." In Holland in the Reformation days when so many refugees from persecution elsewhere came, the deacons' work abounded. Modern life has greatly modified and lessened its place in the church. The life of the usual community,



the work of manifold general institutions and agencies, has affected very much the direct appeal of personal poverty to the local church. It would be occasion for profound regret, however, if there ever died out in the individual member, or in the church as a whole, thought and care for the needy or distressed closely related. Practically, and so far as systematic attention is concerned, the care of the church as a whole for its poor has come to express itself quite exclusively through the communion offering and the almoner's fund administered by one duly appointed deacon.

A much wider and wholly consistent and extremely important field for the office of deacon, now recognized in some churches and perhaps wisely to be recognized in every church, is that of entire church benevolence, benevolence for the poor merging into benevolence for every serviceable enterprise of the church. Foreign missions, home missions, local missions, education—these and the rest might well become a special stewardship for the deacons, for their executive interest, for their official effort in the securing and distributing of support. Ordinarily they pass the plate at the church services; the very act well represents a possible special enlistment in the securing and advancing of the congregation's gifts for all denominational purposes. If such distinct and constant and important duties be committed to and carried out by the deacons, they should have regular meetings of their own, not now customary perhaps in most churches, and should keep their own minutes.

The field of duty in which the deacons are in every church customarily engaged is that of general church administration as dealt with by them joined with the elders in the common body, the consistory, they having equal place with the elders in the various committees responsible for the working system of the church.

42. The elders and deacons shall be chosen from the male members of the church in full communion who have attained the age of twenty-one years.

To hold the office of elder or the office of deacon one must be a member in full communion, not an only baptized

member, and must be at least twenty-one years of age, in contrast with the eighteen years of age requirement for those who vote in the choosing of officers. Only men are eligible. The question has sometimes been raised whether women also might not be made eligible for these offices, a proposal never commanding much discussion or eliciting much support. In one or more of our foreign mission fields a woman has become an elder; but it has been in the church organization of that land, in a church other than our own, such elder continuing, however, a missionary of our own home church.

The number of elders and of deacons to be in office in any church is not defined; it is variable, at the option of the church itself; and there need not be an equal number of each. The quite prevailing custom is four elders and four deacons. Churches that have grown large in membership often increase the number to five or six or eight or more of each. New churches, or old churches that are very small, often have but two elders and two deacons. One elder and one deacon would form a lawful consistory, no doubt. Advantage and disadvantage attach with both large number and small; and the preference depends upon a variety of circumstances.

Usually elders are chosen from among the members who have been deacons. This is natural but not necessary. One who has not been a deacon may be elected an elder with perfect propriety. Perhaps one who had been an elder might be elected a deacon, unusual as it might be. The question may arise whether a minister without charge can be chosen an elder. It appears to be entirely in keeping with our present church order. The minister is a member of the local church; he is not at the time an installed pastor anywhere; nothing seems to make him ineligible; and his experience and aptness may make him a very desirable member of the body of elders and of the consistory.

43. In forming new churches, the Classis or its committee shall meet with such persons as desire to be so organized and shall perform the function of elders in receiving members on confession

or certificate. Elders and deacons shall then be chosen by the communicant members who have attained the age of eighteen years. Notice of the time and place of the proposed organization and of the election of officers shall be published for three Lord's Days in the church or usual place of worship. Installation shall follow as in churches already organized. A Consistory shall not be constituted in any place without the previous advice and concurrence of the Classis.

In forming new churches the initial thesis is that certain persons desire to be so organized. Effort and advice have naturally preceded, the effort of individuals, perhaps the special effort of one, to make clear the wisdom or necessity of a church organization and to unite some people in some movement; effort and advice perhaps of the mission board or of the classis or of minister or missionary in the classis. The desire of the people to be organized has been made known to the classis in way not specified. The classis has been generally aware of it, minister or missionary or board executive has probably set forth details; but quite essentially there has been a petition by the people addressed to the classis asking that they be formed into a church; to this may have been added address from others proposing to attend or to support it; naturally one or more of the petitioners will be present at the meeting of classis to explain and support the request that is made. The classis has examined into the matter, whether such organization be right and wise and of promise, has studied the field, available support, neighborhood of existing churches, has decided that the church be organized, and now appoints a time and place.

Here the formal provision begins. Notice of the time and place of proposed organizing and of attaching election of officers is given for three Sundays at the place where the people to be organized have been worshipping—in their already erected church or in a private house or other temporary worship room or, it may be, in the building of an organized church where the people for the new church are still worshipping with a church membership of which they are still a part. By whom the notice is to be given is not

stated; naturally, by someone the classis has appointed; it might be the minister officiating on the Sundays in point or it might be someone of the forming church group; it would in any case be to all intents a notice of the classis given by one recognized as speaking for it.

At this meeting the classis as a whole or through an appointed committee is with those desiring to be organized. There can be no organizing of the church or election of its officers without the presence of the classis as a body or in its delegated representatives. The classis receives the members, acting for the moment as elders, receiving the certificates which are brought from the church or churches of which the assembled people have been members, and receiving the confession of any others who may wish to join by confession of their faith at once and become original members of the new church. The privilege or duty of receiving members on confession at this time is a new one. Until recent revision the constitution gave little detail concerning the organizing of a church; and apparently only church members, they bringing letters, could be received by the classis at the moment of organization. The provision is now worded with directness and clearness, approving the admission on confession. The procedure is not wholly in accord with the presumably fixed order of church government, that local elders are the one official body to receive confession of faith and to receive members in that way.

The members having been received, the classis declares the church constituted under the name which may have been agreed upon and approved, and the classis further presides over the immediate election of elders and deacons. They are to be elected by the communicant members who are at least eighteen years of age. Women as well as men are the eligible voters. The officers are installed later according to the required order of all such installations.

It is emphatically repeated that no new consistory shall be constituted without the advice and concurrence of the classis. The church having been ecclesiastically organized, its consistory becoming at once a business body, the question

of church incorporation deserves the consistory's early consideration. It is to be assumed that virtually every church should be incorporated; it is a procedure easily accomplished; the business and civic standing is improved and strengthened. There may be exceptions when an incorporating is wisely delayed or even indefinitely omitted.

44. The elders and deacons shall be chosen to serve for two years except in cases where there is a vacancy to be filled, occasioned by death or other cause. The person or persons chosen in such case shall serve for the unexpired term only.

The term of office for elders and deacons is positively prescribed—two years. They cannot be legally elected for longer term; they cannot be elected for shorter term save to fill a vacancy; then they can be elected only for the remaining time of the unexpired term. It is not required that a vacancy be filled by new election; it is usual, and usually wise, no doubt; but circumstances may sometimes advise the continuing of the vacancy until the time of regular election of officers for the next two-year term.

As to continuance of the status of elder, the Reformed Church and the Presbyterian Church have had different ideas, but tend toward agreement. The Presbyterian Church in Scotland emphasized the idea "once an elder always an elder"; that church in this country, not abandoning the life idea, now allows an alternative of three years for active service. The Reformed Church in the Netherlands emphasized election always for brief term; that church in this country now maintains also the idea of the elder as elder for life, though with fixed term of election to the active consistory.

45. Elders and deacons in churches already organized shall be chosen in one of the three methods following: a double number shall be nominated by the Consistory out of which the members of the church in full communion who have attained the age of eighteen years shall make choice; or such members shall unite in nominating and choosing the whole number to be elected without a previous nomination by the Consistory; or the Consistory for the time being, as representing all members of the church, shall choose the entire number. The names of the persons chosen shall be published in the church or usual place of worship of the congrega-



tion on three successive Lord's Days previous to their installation to the end that any lawful objections may be presented to the Consistory and duly adjudicated by them. The method of choosing elders and deacons maintained in any church shall not be changed in that church except by permission of Classis.

There are alternative methods of election of officers, three of them. In the organizing of a new church the method has been purely congregational; in that church this remains the method until formally and lawfully changed. In any organized church one of the three methods is prevailing; it is not necessary to search out when that method came into use. The constitution lays emphasis on the existing method and provides that it must maintain until changed by the higher authority of the classis. That change in some circumstance may be wise cannot be questioned. That a desire for change may become urgent even if it be not wise also cannot be questioned. The way to secure change is made open; the permission of classis alone is necessary. Formal request is presented to the classis and the classis grants or refuses it; if it grants it, the church proceeds to put into effect the new method at the next regular election. The request for a change would naturally come from the consistory, that being in a way the official church in relation to the classis. It is not necessary to say, however, that a request from the congregation, voted in congregational meeting, would not have standing in classis, that classis would be unable to grant request coming from that source, thus effecting change in method; the importance of the consistory's concurrence is very plain, however, and classis would naturally act with extreme care, and with some regard to possible failure to be sustained in a higher court. That classis could enact and effect a change in method without request from the church does not appear.

One method is the open nominating and electing in meeting of the members of the church of voting age. It has the advantage of its pure democracy. The people have full and free privilege of choosing whom they will to represent them and to manage their affairs. It ought to be a good

method with intelligent and gracious and broadminded people. It has the disadvantage of perhaps hasty choice, of possible overlooking of best men, of possible faction and competition and unhappy feeling—none of which, it is assumed, actually attaches with the usual use of the method.

A second method is the nominating by the consistory of a double number for the offices and choice between them by the church members of voting age. It has the advantage of careful forethought by the responsible officers of the church, of thoughtful selection in view of the problems of the church, the circumstances of the time, the new as well as known men eligible for office, the known ideas and preferences of the congregation, while at the same time leaving to the members of the church the choice between two names suggested for each office. It has the disadvantage of somewhat restricting the free choice of the congregation and of necessarily involving the defeat of certain proposed men; they have been named and they have not been chosen; and it is not always sure that they or their particular friends will be wholly free from some discomfort about it; it is not easy for everyone always to know no embarrassment in such circumstance. There ought not to be feeling and of course it is to be assumed that this excellent method is generally free from it.

The third method is the choice by the consistory itself; the elders and deacons choose their own successors; they act for the church which they represent. It has the advantage of careful forethought and positive decision without involving any public nomination or public balloting, of making possible all best adjustments to the work in hand, all best choice from members old and new, retention of the same officers or substitution of new as may appear best to the consistory. It has the disadvantage of leaving the members without any privilege of choice, of possible confining of the official body to a certain few, especially by immediate re-election, and, on the other hand, of embarrassing the consistory in re-electing themselves sometimes when the immediate retention of some men in office is very wise.

While in theory this method may not seem best in days when democratic privilege is much emphasized, nevertheless it maintains in many churches with general satisfaction, has maintained for many years with little objection or desire for change. Its worthiness depends quite entirely on the way in which the consistory uses it.

It is not stated at what time or after what notice the annual election shall be held. This is left to the local church. The names of the elected officers must be published in the church on three Sundays before installation takes place, giving opportunity for lawful objection. Such objection is rarely made; when made it must be considered and judged by the consistory. It may seem that it is without weight and readily to be set aside. It may seem to be not wholly negligible but to be proper subject of conference with the objector and with the elected officer to the end that the situation be cleared up, the objection perhaps withdrawn. It may seem that it has grave weight, compelling postponement of the officer's installation or entire omitting of it. By inference the power rests with the consistory of not carrying to completion the choice they or the congregation have made. Objection, to have real standing, would naturally come from a member of the church; but the consistory would be justified, no doubt, in giving consideration to one coming from an objector outside the congregation.

46. One-half of the whole number of both elders and deacons shall be elected annually in order to avoid an entire change of the Consistory at one time. The same method of electing one-half of the whole number shall be pursued in enlarging Consistories, so far as relates to the additional members. The first elders and deacons of new churches shall at the first meeting of the Consistory after their installation determine by lot who of their number shall serve for one year and who shall serve for two years. Elders and deacons may be re-elected but shall not be re-ordained and need be re-installed only when two terms of service are not consecutive.

With good judgment it is provided that half the positions in the consistory be filled with two-year election in alternate years. Entire change of a consistory membership

is thus avoided; certain members active in the administration carry over into the continuing service. To start this system in a new church two-year men and one-year men are to be determined by lot. The possible enlargement of a consistory is here spoken of but without any detail suggestions or requirements as to it. Power to determine upon an increase or decrease in the number of elders and deacons resides, it is fair to say, with the power that is active in the choice of the officers, that is the consistory or the communicants, as the case may be. There might readily be a vote of either to the other recommending change or advising it.

Re-election of officers is allowed without restriction. An officer continues active service only by re-election, but his ordination at first election and installation is enduring. Once ordained always ordained unless the ordination is annulled. The ceremony of ordination is therefore not to be repeated for an elder or a deacon any more than for a minister. The words, "shall not be re-ordained," rightly take the place of the words, "need not be re-ordained," appearing in the constitution, 1874, and wrongly remaining in the liturgy not recently revised. If re-elected immediately upon expiration of his term it is not necessary even that he be re-installed. If elected again after a period out of office he must be re-installed. It is advisable perhaps that the re-installation always take place, giving point and dignity to the renewed assuming of active duties and giving reminder to both officers and people, by the words of the liturgy, of the responsibilities and relationships involved.

The liturgy is necessary in every such ceremony. Excellent as the liturgy is, criticism may perhaps be made that the form for ordination and the form for installation are so largely the same. This sameness might seem to lessen the unique dignity of the church's ordination, to place ordained and unordained men too much in the same position, especially when they stand together in the ceremony of installation. It seems so much like re-ordaining of the already ordained or mere installing of the unordained. There is one item, however, which is very distinctive and which, though

optional, may wisely and always maintain. That is the laying on of hands. This tactual expressing of the church's setting apart in God's name to holy office, never omitted in case of ministers, is finely appropriate and impressive in the case of elders and deacons. As in the case of the minister it is a laying on of hands by the presbytery, the classis, so in the case of elder or deacon it is a laying on of hands by the presbyter, the minister. In the absence of more extended difference in the wording of the liturgy, this laying on of hands, with the few words attending it, is a distinction evident and most significant between ordination and installation.

Rotation in office, that is the habitual electing of others than those whose terms expire, is not referred to in the constitution. A consistory may think this wise and vote that they will put only new names in nomination; or the members, in so far as the nominating or electing belongs to them, may establish such a custom. But the custom may be changed at any time by consistory or people, as the case may be. It is not a matter of constitutional order and the authority of classis is not in point. The custom has advantages in enlisting the service of more men and in securing new ideals or new energies of value. It is quite as true, however, that sometimes there is pronounced value in re-electing men of special usefulness or in whose charge is some special immediate interest.



## ARTICLE V

### OF ECCLESIASTICAL ASSEMBLIES IN GENERAL

SECTION 50. The four ecclesiastical assemblies and judicatories of the Reformed Church in America shall be constituted as follows:

The Consistory shall consist of elders and deacons together with the minister or ministers who have been regularly installed in office.

The Classis shall consist of all its enrolled ministers and of elders representing the churches within the bounds designated by a Particular Synod. One elder shall be delegated by each Consistory. A collegiate church shall be entitled to an elder for each ordinary worshipping assembly.

The Particular Synod shall consist of four ministers and four elders from each Classis within the bounds designated by the General Synod.

The General Synod shall consist of two ministers and two elders from each of the Classes having on the roll of its churches three thousand or less than three thousand communicant members, and an additional representation of one minister and one elder shall be allowed for each additional three thousand or fraction of three thousand communicant members. There shall also be one representative from each of the theological schools under the supervision of the General Synod.

The elders who are to represent Classis in the Particular Synod and the General Synod may be chosen from the entire body of the eldership within the Classis.

The four ecclesiastical bodies of graded authority in the order of the church are assemblies in their deliberative, legislative, and executive functions; and they are judicatories when they resolve themselves into courts and start judicial processes appropriate to them.

The consistory consists of the installed minister or ministers and the elders and the deacons of the local church. Originally, in Holland, it included only the elders with the minister. The Rules of Dort said: "Where the number of elders is too small, the deacons may be admitted as mem-

bers of the consistory." In America the Explanatory Articles, 1792, said: "The elders with the ministers of the word constitute what the Reformed Dutch Church properly calls the consistory. But as the deacons have always in America, where the congregations at first were very small, been joined with the elders," etc. While this has been since that time the positive order of the church, the old use of the word, consistory, as meaning elders only with the minister still lingers in certain provisions of the constitution. (*e.g.*, 140, 141.)

The question may arise whether the minister with only elders, if the church happens to be without deacons, or with only deacons, if the church happens to be without elders, or the minister with only one elder or only one deacon would compose a legal consistory. It is fair to assume the affirmative since no number is named as requisite to the body. The absence of one of the three constituents, the minister, does not impair the body; if there is no installed minister, the elders and deacons compose a lawful consistory. So the absence of elder or deacon may fairly be regarded as a vacancy not destroying the body. Sometimes in extreme circumstance a consistory has been reduced to one man; he is regarded as the lawful custodian of that which was in the custody of the consistory. It will be borne in mind that a minister not installed, even if a stated supply of long continuance, is not as a minister a member of the consistory. He is not to preside at its meetings except as the consistory makes the special request. It will also be borne in mind that the elders and deacons cannot act as a consistory without recognition of the installed minister as a member of it; also that an elder or deacon is not in office, is not a member of consistory, until he has been installed.

The classis includes in its membership all ministers who have been received by it whether they are pastors of churches or without charge. It includes also one elder from each church, from churches with more than one church building and worshipping assembly one elder for each such separate body. The elder is the delegate of the consistory

and no elder can be a delegate save as he is officially chosen for this service. The words, "shall be delegated by each consistory," are not exactly consistent with the words in section 75 which definitely provide that "the elders with the ministers alone have a voice . . . in choosing delegates to attend classis."

The Particular Synod consists of a definite number of delegates, four ministers and four elders from each classis belonging to it, irrespective of the size of the classis. These delegates are of course chosen by the classes respectively. The elders chosen need not necessarily be men who have been members of, delegates to, a classis; they should be men at the time active in consistory; they need be from no particular churches in a classis, although some rotation of churches in this connection is generally observed by the classes.

The General Synod consists of a number subject to some variation according to the number of communicants represented. The delegates are chosen by the Particular Synods, but the basis of representation is still the classes and the classes nominate to the Particular Synod ministers and elders whom the synod customarily names as the delegates to the General Synod. The minimum representation is two ministers and two elders from each classis; if the classis has as many as 3,001 communicants and not more than 6,000, it shall have a third minister and a third elder as delegates; if the classis has as many as 6,001 communicants and not more than 9,000, it shall have a fourth minister and a fourth elder as delegates; so for each added 3,000 or fraction thereof. As in the case of the Particular Synod, the elder delegates to General Synod may be chosen from the entire body of eldership in the classis, need not necessarily be from those who have been delegates to lower body; but they should be active in some consistory. Nor is any rotation necessary though often desirable no doubt; nor must the elders come from the churches whose ministers are sent as delegates. The local churches have no constitutional status for representation in either synod.

In addition to the minister and elder delegates in the General Synod there shall also be, it is provided, one representative from each of the theological schools. As already said, this is a recent provision; until lately each seminary was simply invited to send a representative, not a membership delegate with vote; the merits of the new arrangement may be evident; but there is some reason to regard it as not wholly pertinent in the church's order of representative government.

51. A Classis has the same jurisdiction over a Consistory which a Particular Synod has over a Classis and which the General Synod has over a Particular Synod. A higher assembly shall take cognizance only of those things which cannot be determined in the lower assembly, or which appertain to the churches or congregations in general which compose such assembly.

The distinct and sequent jurisdictions of the several ecclesiastical bodies are clear in principle but may present in practice occasionally a difficult problem. The higher body has jurisdiction over the lower as appeals and other processes may bring proceedings of the lower to the higher in natural and constitutional order. The higher assembly is to concern itself only with matters which the lower assembly cannot determine; this might suggest a vagueness of dividing line, but in practice there is rarely if ever any uncertainty. The higher assembly naturally deals also with matters which concern all the churches within its boundaries, not those which concern only the churches within one of its constituent parts; in taking up such matters, however, there is much need for discretion lest there be trespass upon what is naturally under authority of one of the lower assemblies. The lower assembly, it is plain, is to do all that it can, saving the higher from unnecessary demand upon its time and attention.

52. Delegates to the Synods and elders delegated to the Classes shall be admitted only on credentials from the assemblies which send them. Only such persons shall be entitled to a vote.

The need of formality in the choice of delegate or delegates by the body represented is stressed by the requiring

of credentials. The clerk of the represented assembly is the one naturally to write the certificate of appointment; the president perhaps might do so acceptably. Without such credentials there is no voting privilege. It must be admitted that such credentials are not always presented or asked for, that a delegate often attends and votes without them. Rarely would there be any uncertainty about the actual appointment; rarely would there be anyone to challenge anyone presenting himself as a delegate at the representative assembly. Care in the matter may be of much importance some time, however, when a vital issue is at stake, when division of vote may be close, when challenges may appear, when technical fault or incompleteness may work very unfortunate result.

53. The appointment of a delegate to an ecclesiastical assembly shall cease to be valid if his membership in the assembly which he was commissioned to represent shall be terminated during the period for which he was appointed.

An elder may have passed out of the consistory, may even have transferred his church membership, between the time of his being chosen as delegate of the consistory to classis and the time of the meeting of the classis, or during the time for which he was appointed; the appointment is no longer in effect. A minister or an elder may have transferred his membership to another classis between the time of his appointment as delegate from the classis to Particular Synod or General Synod and the time of the meeting of the synod or during the period for which he was appointed; his appointment is no longer in effect. If a minister or an elder appointed to represent classis in synod changes his church connection to another church in the same classis between time of his appointment and the meeting to which he is appointed, the appointment is not impaired: it remains in effect. In cases as above where the appointment lapses, the lapsing is *ipso facto*; no formality is necessary; the appointing body becomes aware of the change and may proceed to make new appointment.



54. A member of any ecclesiastical assembly shall not have the right of protest against any act or decision of that body; but in addition to redress by appeal or complaint he shall have the right to require that the names of all members present who vote for or against such act or decision shall be entered in the minutes of the assembly for the information of all concerned.

The denying of the right to protest may seem at first not altogether fair. The right maintained in the earlier procedure of the church. The records of various assemblies, of the General Synod, include not a few such incidents. The tendency to protest was so natural, often without adequate reason and with undue prejudice, and so liable to encumber the proceedings and minutes of the assembly without worthwhile result, that it was found advisable and justifiable to do away with the privilege; this was done in the constitution, 1833. Adequate recourse is allowed, however, in lieu of protest. The yea and nay vote, the names of all thus voting, must be recorded in the minutes of the assembly at the demand of the would-be maker of protest against the action taken or decision made; this record is often important, of permanent significance. There is also the right of appeal and also the right of complaint to be presented according to the definite provisions of the constitution.

55. Ecclesiastical matters only shall be considered and transacted in ecclesiastical assemblies.

The limit laid down by the words, "ecclesiastical matters only," cannot be exactly defined. Matters of the church itself, of its life, administration, varied work are primarily intended as the natural field of the church's jurisdiction. It is plain that a church assembly is not to trespass in the field of personal or community jurisdiction. But there constantly arise matters which are on the border line, which are in the field of public, especially political, jurisdiction, yet which deeply concern the moral welfare of people and the spiritual life of the church. The church assemblies have not felt that they were stopped from consideration of such matters or from making some pronouncement concerning them. They discuss the movements and organizations against

war and for world peace, not as such belonging to them, and express themselves about them; so they have concerned themselves with the liquor question, and with slavery in past years, with the Civil War in its time and, long ago, with the Revolutionary War, committing themselves to the side that seemed to them right. There sometimes seems imperative reason for, abundant justifying of, action touching such things as inseparate from the service to humankind to which the church is consecrated. It is plain that action in such field can be, generally, no more than expression of sentiment, of conviction, of support; and it is plain that there always must be great discretion and care. There is peril of intruding where the assembly has no privilege. There is peril of dealing with such matters in excess or in wrong form or in obedience to a party's personal feelings and alliances. Sometimes members of an assembly in informal gathering might properly discuss matters quite beyond the assembly's official province but of urgent related interest. It is wise provision that in the assembly there be only ecclesiastical matters, however difficult sometimes may be the determining of their boundary.

56. There shall be a president and a clerk in each ecclesiastical assembly. It shall be the duty of the president to state and explain the business which is to be transacted, to enforce the Rules of Order and in general to maintain a decorum and dignity becoming an assembly of the Church of Christ. It shall be the duty of the clerk to keep a faithful record of all the proceedings. The transactions of all ecclesiastical assemblies shall begin and end with prayer.

No vice-president is mentioned. There is such an officer, however, in the General Synod. The title has maintained for many years, and it is referred to in section 115. Until 1883 the title of this officer was adessor. Other officers may be added in any assembly to the two whom the constitution requires; a treasurer would quite surely be named. There is no requirement expressed concerning the details of officer appointment. Elsewhere it appears that the minister must be the president of consistory. Often in a classis this office goes by rotation, changing with each regular

session. In Particular Synod and General Synod it is usually by open election. The clerk, elected or appointed, is usually a continuing officer, his title in classis and synods being stated clerk.

It is of great importance that the president be well qualified to preside. It is of even greater importance that the clerk be well qualified to make and keep records. It is very unfortunate that presiding ability is not more sure, still more unfortunate that exact and wholly competent record-keeping is not more sure. Every consistory and classis and synod should have as its clerk the very best available man. Inaccuracy and incompleteness and loss of records are nothing less than a tragedy in the local and more general history of the church in this country. Records should be kept in a safe or in a deposit box in a bank; a successor coming into the office of clerk should receive in full form all current record and old records as well if they have been in the clerk's immediate care. Where a local church or a classis has not its own safe, it should surely make a local bank the custodian of all back records, all books not in current use.

Every minister should, in his self-preparing for all best service, make himself familiar with the duty of presiding, should preserve or acquire aptness to handle correctly, promptly, efficiently, and graciously the business of an assembly, its discussions and transactions.

Every session of an assembly must begin and end with prayer. It is in itself appropriate, recognizing the religious character of the assembly and of the work that is to be or has been done. More than this, it should be a genuine and real exercise, not merely perfunctory, a service of prayer that will substantially help in the undertaking or completing of the affairs in hand. So imperative is this requirement that the higher assembly always inspects the assembly's minutes for record of this item and, if it is omitted, calls attention to the fact.

## ARTICLE VI

### OF CONSISTORIES

SECTION 60. The elders and deacons have an equal voice in Consistory in whatever relates to the temporalities of the church, the calling or dismissal of a minister, and the choice of their successors. They are the general and joint representatives of the congregation in these matters, and unless otherwise provided by the act of incorporation of the church are the trustees of the church property.

The temporalities of the church, in difference from the spiritual matters committed to the elders, are the field of the consistory's jurisdiction. The line between the two fields cannot be drawn with exactness. The calling of a minister is here specifically mentioned as in consistory field; it is thus especially mentioned in view perhaps of possible uncertainty in which field it naturally would be. The relation of a minister is contractual and with trustees. The determining and arranging of religious services which might be considered as of the spiritual proceedings are quite invariably in the care of the consistory. The separate spiritual matters cared for by the elders are somewhat defined in section 40. In the consistory there is entire equality; the elders have no priority over the deacons, no authority, no vote, no weight of vote, more than they save in the election of delegate; elders and deacons equally represent the membership of the church; the representative aspect of the body is properly borne in mind rather than the authoritative. The dismissal (preferably dismission) of a minister is also mentioned, but without strict accuracy; the consistory has no power of dismissing a minister; it has power to call him; the classis approves and installs; only the classis dissolves the relation, and only the classis may dismiss the minister

to a different classis. Also the phrase, choice of successors, is not to be misunderstood. In only one of the three methods of choosing do the consistory make the choice. Where that method maintains, elders and deacons have equal voice in choosing to both offices. In connection with the other two methods also, however, they have equal voice in "whatever relates" to the choice—incidental questions, not the choice itself.

A vitally important item in the church law is the constituting of the consistory as the trustees of the church property. An exception is where by act of civil incorporation other arrangement is required. There are a few instances of such incorporation prior to the formulating of this church law. In any present day incorporating this church law would be recognized by consistent provisions. There might also be a law in some state which would require a modified plan of trusteeship. It is a rare church in the denomination now organized for any compelling reason in other than the normal way. The laws of New York, 1784, 1788, 1801, 1813, 1835, and 1884 may be referred to. An act of 1835 authorized Reformed (Dutch) churches to have a board of trustees other than the consistory; it had been requested by one or more churches; few availed themselves of the power and they not without later regret. The General Synod disapproved of it. In 1884 an act was passed permitting such churches to go back to the old organization, consistory trustees.

The property questions, beyond the ordinary providing and care of buildings and grounds, may be important and manifold, questions of insurance, taxation, assessments, of acquiring and disposing of property, of investment and use of funds. It is necessary to be familiar with and obedient to the laws of the civil jurisdiction. It is also necessary to be regardful of the denominational welfare and requirement. It is necessary not to ignore the wishes or requests of the congregation. The trustees are generally in full control, not subject to the voice of the congregation although wisely regardful of it. In such major matter as the dis-



posing of property, however, it is essential that the state or other law be consulted to ascertain the rights possessed and the procedures that must be followed. It is generally established, too, that property owned by a local church cannot be alienated from the denomination. A minority in consistory or membership may usually hold the property against any alienation proposed or attempted by a majority. Or, if there be no local party or person to hold the property in peril of alienation, the classis as the higher representative body is usually in legal position to receive and hold it. Classis has not infrequently been gravely at fault in passively allowing the dissipation of denominational property by local church officers. The laws of New York regarding denominational rights in local church property are quite clear; and the laws of other states may be somewhat similar. "Since the enactment of Chapter 70 of the Laws of 1875 religious corporations have a denominational character. The fourth section of that act directs that the property of every corporation founded under section 3 of the act of 1813, shall be applied by the trustees for the benefit of such corporation, 'according to the discipline, rules and usages of the denomination to which the church members of the corporation belong,' and it forbids the diverting of the same to any other purpose." . . . "And, since the enactment of the Laws of 1875, Chapter 79, and the Laws of 1876, Chapter 176, requiring the trustees of a religious corporation to administer the temporalities thereof in accordance with the rules and usages of the denomination to which the church belongs, a court of equity has jurisdiction to restrain the trustees from the misuse of the property under their care and control." (McKinney's Consolidated Laws of New York. Annotated. Book 50. Religious Corporations Law.)

It is of utmost importance that a consistory be seriously conscious of its status as the trustee body. It ought to be so apt to the trustee responsibility, so faithful in it, as to conserve well every temporal interest of the church and command the respect of the business world. The absence

of business ability here or there or of strict business attention to the temporal values has led to some disposition to place gifts or bequests of funds in the hands of other holding body, a trust company perhaps, for the benefit of the church, such a company being regarded as the more stable and qualified administrator of principal, the income to be paid by it to the consistory for current expense or special purpose according to the terms of gift. This may not be an unwise or undesirable procedure. If it encourages permanent benefaction, it is deserving of all praise. But the consistory is the normal trustee of the church's funds, must sometimes be trustee of large or small capital fund, and it ought to manage such fund or funds with entirely adequate care. It is wise, especially in large churches or those having endowment funds, to have a treasurer of recognized business standing as well as finest Christian character and to have him continue in office year after year. The treasurer need not necessarily be a member of consistory.

The particular current care of church buildings and grounds is often committed to church warden or wardens. The word is old in the use of the church. Or the word was church master. Such officer is set forth in the articles of 1792 (30). He was elected by the consistory, was usually a member of it. In churches of today, this particular care is usually committed to a committee of consistory; if they receive the added title of church wardens or church masters, the charge and the dignity of it may be emphasized. Of course charge of all temporalities means the consistory's responsibility for all current financing of the church. It is for it to decide and carry out the system for raising the necessary maintenance, for meeting every current expense, whether by pew rents, envelope offerings, general offerings, special subscriptions, or other method, any or all methods. It is to be expected that the system will be adequate and effectual, that as trustees the consistory will secure a proper budget and will keep the church financially sound.

This order of the church, elders and deacons with minister the trustees, is distinctive, an arrangement added to the usual presbyterial government. A local Presbyterian Church has its board of elders, the session, and, distinct from it, a board of trustees. The members of the board of trustees need not be communicant members of the church though perhaps they prevailingly are. The consistory-trustee order has certain advantages. It is good to have the trustees all communicant members. It is good to have the temporalities cared for by a body in which are the elders to whom at the same time the spiritual concerns are committed, that the action in the two fields may be quite surely in accord. It is good to have the property interests in the charge of a body meeting with regularity and frequency rather than of a separate board which, in the smaller churches with infrequent major questions, might meet but infrequently at special call. On the other hand, a separate board of trustees may meet with regularity and frequency, and it is somewhat urged that the system permits the official using of the valuable interest and business capacity of person or persons in the congregation but not in the full communion of the church.

In discussion of such matters in 1888 Professor Briggs of the Presbyterian Church said: "The board of trustees has certainly no authority in the Bible or the Presbyterian standards. The Reformed Churches have a better way. The elders and deacons together constitute the consistory and the pastor is the executive head. In this way there is unity, cooperation and efficiency."

61. The minister shall preside at all meetings of the Consistory except as elsewhere provided. The Consistory may appoint one of the elders to be its president *pro tem.* in the absence of the minister. If there is a plurality of ministers they shall preside in rotation.

The minister in all ordinary circumstance is the president of the consistory. It is *ipso facto*; there is no election. If there is no installed minister or if he is absent, an elder, not a deacon, is to be president *pro tem.*, appointed, that

is elected, by the body. A stated supply is not to hold this office. The presiding by the minister is a wise and orderly arrangement; there is in it a desirable definiteness and continuance; his special aptness to the work of presiding is assumed and there ought to be no disappointment in that regard. The presiding in rotation in the church where there are more ministers than one is subject to no detail requirement; the rotation may be meeting by meeting or it may be period by period; the non-presiding minister has of course his vote as provided in section 50. The minister being a member of consistory and its president cannot separate himself from the administration of the church's business affairs. It may be wise to leave them just as largely as possible to the lay members; but argument that they are out of his province has no weight; and more often than not his business judgment and enterprise are of vital importance, of determining force.

62. The Great Consistory of any church consists of all the members in connection with that church who have served it as elders or deacons. It may be convened when matters of special importance relating to the welfare of the church are to be considered. The members of the Great Consistory have only an advisory voice in any meeting.

The great consistory is more than an informal and negligible body; it is formal and it is substantial in the church's constitutional order. It consists of all who have ever served the particular church as elders or deacons and are still members of it; it therefore includes the active consistory; it does not include members of the church who, when members of another church, have served officially in that church. It is not required to meet at any time; it may be convened. By whom it shall be convened is not stated—perhaps by its own initiative, perhaps by common consent, perhaps by request of the congregation; but the normal and directly official convening of it would be by call of the active consistory.

The occasion for convening it is various, matter of major church importance. It may be the calling of a minister; it

may be a question of property purchase, erection, renovation, or sale; it may be a difficult or delicate question in the general life of the church. The convening may be very desirable in lieu of a congregational meeting or in prelude to it. It affords an opportunity to secure wider expression of opinion than the active consistory affords without the embarrassment possible in public congregational discussion.

The meeting of the great consistory may be a formal meeting fully its own or it may be a meeting of the consistory with the past members in conference. In any case it has, or the members of it have, only advisory voice, no authority. In conference with the active officers the past members of consistory may individually express judgment and wish without sharing in any vote. If it be formally a meeting of the great consistory, as perhaps it would wisely and usually be, then there may be vote of the body of course. It can be only a vote of judgment or desire or recommendation but it may be very positive nevertheless. Unanimously or by majority it may give to the consistory its decision on the merits of a question in order that the consistory may in the light of such advice proceed in their own discretion and with their own authority.

63. The Consistory has the right to call a minister for its own congregation except where otherwise provided by the act of incorporation of the church. It must endeavor, in exercising this right, to learn what person would be acceptable to the members of the church.

No act of incorporation of date since the constitution made this or like provision would provide other than as the constitution prescribes. Act of incorporation, whether of earlier or later time, may not have mentioned at all the manner of calling a minister. Certain charters of far past time did deal with this matter, not necessarily in a diverse way. The Dutch and English churches in New York and New Jersey before the Revolution, some of them, had charters; among them are the churches of New York City, Albany, Kingston, Schenectady, Bergen, Hackensack, Raritan. Such charters received all necessary later confirming.



In virtually every church of the denomination, then, the consistory has the right to call a minister; the congregation itself does not possess the right; nor is the consistory subject to the congregation in the matter. It is mandatory upon the consistory, however, that it endeavor to learn who will be acceptable to the people; the congregation is here spoken of, and then almost at once the members of the church are spoken of. They are perhaps technically the same, as already said. But the word, congregation, in current use has a broader meaning than members of the church. Each church may use its own tests in determining its own congregation thus understood; there is no standard definition. The General Synod in 1901 (1122) proposed as composing the congregation members of the church and regular contributors. The usual church is probably disposed to add regular attendants, if there be any not included in the two primary groups. In any case a consistory, commanded to ascertain who will be agreeable to the members, will naturally include with the members those in any substantial way counted as parishioners.

No method of gaining the desired information is proposed; it is entirely in the discretion of the consistory and it may be most private and informal. It may be chiefly by a quiet listening to expressions individually and generally made. It may be by some activity on the part of each member of consistory, definitely inquiring as opportunity appears. It may be by a systematic canvass of the whole congregation. It may be by a meeting of the great consistory, other ways perhaps associated with it. It may be by a congregational meeting. As a basis for any such work of ascertaining opinion, the consistory is very likely to have invited a minister they think of as possible pastor to preach in the church. That is old-time custom still largely prevailing. Sentiment has grown somewhat against it. It is argued that a church cannot judge well from one hearing or even more and, more especially, that it is not quite fair to the minister, placing him in a position which possibly misrepresents him and may prove a little humiliating. It will readily

be admitted that if a consistory can happily find and call the acceptable man without such appearing by him before the people it is the surely best way. It must also be urged that no consistory should invite a thought-of man to preach in its pulpit until by hearing him in his own pulpit and by all proper inquiries it has satisfied itself that he is its choice, subject only to the favor of the congregation. When this has been said, it must be added that the preaching of the thus-far chosen man in the church is not really unreasonable. It is natural and it is right that a congregation should see and hear a minister before he is called to be their permanent minister. Nor ought the minister to regard this as humiliating or even uncomfortable. He will wish to address the congregation in any case before he accepts the call. He is accustomed to preach in other pulpits than his own on many different occasions. The word, candidate, so often used is unfortunate and should not be used. In this connection it often gives a false meaning to a minister's presence in the pulpit, misrepresents his attitude, and even where the minister is known to be willing to receive and accept a call it is for more reasons than one inappropriate. The word, candidate, has a definite technical meaning in the church order, the man licensed to preach.

A congregational meeting to set forth the favor or disfavor of the congregation is not always a wise proceeding. It may be advisable. It has no formal place in the denominational procedure, however much the democratic principle is recognized—save on occasion of choice of officers by the members of the church. The formal calling of the congregation would be by the consistory. It is called in such way and for such purpose and with such procedure as the consistory may decide. It may find it necessary, and it may not, to define just who are the congregation asked to convene. In asking for a vote the consistory will naturally explain whom it is inviting to vote. It may be members of the church, attendants, and contributors. It may be members of the church only; if so, it may be only those eighteen years of age and over, the age required by the constitution

in the voting for officers. The consistory may state that a majority vote is desired, or two-thirds or even three-fourths, to sustain any particular proposal set forth. It may announce the single item, or more than one, for which the meeting is called, may confine the asking of advice to just that field. The power of the meeting is in any case only advisory, it cannot be compelling. The consistory will naturally follow the advice given but it may be convinced that it is not wise to do so. It must act in its best judgment, and this may mean the carrying out of the wish of a minority, not of a majority. In a vote of sentiment concerning a minister for whom a call is proposed, an even large majority favorable might not make a proceeding with the call surely wise. The advantage of a meeting is its giving privilege of free expression by everyone; the quite likely disadvantage is the opportunity for words not wise in public and for an open dividing into parties.

64. A minister of the Classis shall superintend the proceedings of a Consistory when it desires to make a call. The instrument is to be officially signed by the members of Consistory and if the church be incorporated it is proper to affix the seal of the corporation. The call when completed must be laid by the Consistory before the Classis and approved before it can be presented to the person called. If the call be approved and accepted, the name of the minister shall be published in the church on three successive Lord's Days, that opportunity may be given for presenting lawful objections.

The consistory, when it wishes to make a call, invites a minister of the classis to which the church belongs to superintend the proceedings, that is to attend the meeting, to oversee its action, presumably to preside, and to sign the call as "moderator" of it. This is the only use of this word in the constitution. The wisdom of this arrangement is plain. It serves accuracy and propriety. The minister is supposed to see that the call is made out in form required, with which he may be more familiar than the members of consistory. He is supposed to advise as to various questions in point. If he knows anything which makes the call seem to him unwise he may at least say so and advise against it.

In the stating of the obligations he may make valuable suggestions. In the fixing of the salary his advice may be very useful to the consistory, very helpful to the expected minister. Having been voted in lawful meeting, the call is to be signed individually by the members of the consistory, all of them if that may be; the absence of any name through disagreement or for any impeding cause would not impair the document. A majority vote and signatures of the majority would be adequate, although a call made in that way may be presumed to be very unwise; and a disapproval by classis might readily follow. The seal of the incorporated church should be attached.

The call then is laid before the classis in regular or special session. It may have been sent to the clerk of classis by the clerk of consistory; it may be in the hands of the church's elder delegate to classis and be delivered in person by him; it may be remaining in the hands of the minister who moderated it and who brings it to the classis. In any case this delegate and this minister will naturally be at the meeting of classis to sustain the signed call and to give any explanations concerning it. The classis may then disapprove it for any reason which seems to it sufficient; and the matter goes no further. If the classis approves, as is almost always the case, the call is then delivered to the minister to whom it is addressed for his answer. He may be present at the meeting and it is handed to him. More likely he is not there and it is handed to him or mailed to him later by the clerk of the classis or by a representative of the consistory. He may give his answer, accepting or declining, in the classis meeting itself or he may give answer at any later time.

It is usual, usually necessary, that some approach by the consistory to a desired minister precede the formal call. The decision of the consistory for a certain minister leads to some ascertaining whether he is willing to accept a call. This cannot be considered out of order or unfortunate in most instances; but such communication should not go too far, especially if the minister be not well and favorably

known in the church; and in any case the presenting of a formal call should never precede its submitting to the classis and its approving by the classis; the substance of the proposed call can be informally made known to the minister concerned. By entire discretion any embarrassing of him, of the church, of the classis, should be avoided.

It is good perhaps to read the call, if approved and accepted, to the congregation; it will tell them in detail what is done, will remind them of the nature of the bond between themselves and the minister, and will at least seem to make them more fully participant in the action taken in their name. In any case the name of the minister called must be published in the church three Sundays. This is wise simply as an informing of everyone and a formal enlisting of everyone in the coming relationship. It gives opportunity for objection; this rarely appears; but it may. There may be dissenters who have something weighty to say; there may be new adverse facts, unknown when classis gave its approval; whatever may be thus set forth must receive the attention of the classis, be passed upon by it as, or as not, an impediment to the proposed installation. The publishing of the name will naturally be accompanied by announcement of time and place of the proposed installation. An elder of the church should be named by the classis to do the required publishing, or to see that it is done; the minister who is officiating in the pulpit may do it at the request of classis or consistory or elder.

65. The form of the call of a church to a minister shall be as follows:

To N. N.

Grace, Mercy and Peace from God our Father and Jesus Christ our Lord.

WHEREAS: the                      church of                      is well satisfied of the piety, gifts and ministerial qualifications of you, N. N., and has good hope that your labors as a minister of the gospel in this place will be attended with a blessing;

Therefore; We (*here insert the legal title of the Church*) hereby solemnly and in the fear of the Lord, do call you, the said N. N., to be our pastor and teacher, to preach the word of God in truth and faithfulness, to administer the Holy Sacraments agreeably to



the institution of Christ, to edify the congregation and especially the youth by catechetical instruction and by explaining the essential truths of the Holy Scriptures, to maintain Christian discipline and fulfill as a faithful servant of Jesus Christ the whole work of the gospel ministry in conformity with the Word of God and the Constitution of the Reformed Church in America, to which you, upon accepting this call, must, with us, remain subordinate.

It is further stipulated that in fulfilling the ordinary duties of your ministry, besides preaching on such texts of Scripture as you may deem proper to select for our instruction, you also explain the points of doctrine contained in the Heidelberg Catechism and that you conform to the usual practice of our congregation in rendering all customary public service. The particular service which is required of you is (*here insert such particulars as the consistory may deem necessary*).

We promise you in the name of this church all proper attention, love and obedience in the Lord. We promise and oblige ourselves to encourage you in the discharge of the duties of your important office and to free you from worldly avocations while you are dispensing spiritual blessings to us to pay you the sum of \$        in        payments yearly and every year, so long as you continue the minister of this church, together with (*here insert particulars which may refer to a parsonage or residence, or other emoluments*). We hereby bind ourselves and our successors for the performance of all the foregoing by the underwritten signatures of the Consistory to this instrument.

The Lord incline your heart to a cheerful acceptance of this call and send you to us in the fullness of the blessing of the Gospel of Peace.

Done in Consistory and subscribed with our names this  
day of        in the year

Attested by N. N.

Moderator of the Call.

Few forms for church official action appear with verbal exactness in the constitution. An exact form of call is required. The words used present very clearly the various items to be surely understood by consistory and minister; they need little comment. The substance of the call is its emphasis on the spiritual service of the minister as steward of the gospel of the grace of God in a local congregation, on his obligation as pastor, teacher, preacher. His work, it is provided, must be in conformity with the Word of God and the constitution of the Reformed Church in America. So important is the attention to the Heidelberg Catechism,

referred to also in sections 25 and 89, that it is specifically mentioned in the call, becoming a specific item of the obligation to be assumed in the contract made. To the customary public service of all churches, there is added any appropriate word as to service particular to the church in point; in the provided place are inserted such items as the number of services on Sunday, places of additional service, prayer meeting, Sunday-school—if these are to be committed to his immediate charge. There are also to be inserted the items of salary and other compensation or privilege, the amount of salary, the parsonage or allowance for house, any additional items of support, possible assistance in the work, length of vacation. The manner of salary payment arising for decision at the making of the call, the making of monthly payment should receive careful consideration; it will quite surely be the method most acceptable to the minister.

The gracious and spiritual quality of the call stands emphatic at its beginning and at its close: "Grace, Mercy and Peace from God our Father and Jesus Christ our Lord"; "The Lord incline your heart . . . and send you to us in the fullness of the blessing of the Gospel of Peace."

A most important quality of the call, on the other hand, is its status as a civil contract. It is more than an agreement between minister and consistory which as Christian men they must fulfill. It is a contract recognized by civil authority and subject to enforcement by this under circumstances compelling its attention. In general, it will be remembered that civil courts sustain the provisions of a church government, sustain church officers and church courts in carrying them out.

"A priest or minister of any church by assuming that relation necessarily subjects his conduct in that capacity to the laws and customs of the ecclesiastical body from which he derives his office and in whose name he exercises his functions, and when he submits questions concerning his rights, duties and obligations as such priest or minister to the proper church judicatory, and they have been heard

and decided according to the prescribed forms, such decision is binding upon him and will be respected by civil courts. The decisions of the courts in this country are substantially in accordance with this view . . . he can always insist, of course, that his civil or property rights as an individual or citizen shall be determined according to the law of the land, but his relations, rights, and obligations arising from his position as a member of some religious body may be determined according to the laws and procedure enacted by that body for such purpose." (McKinney's Consolidated Laws of New York. Annotated. Book 50. Religious Corporations Law.)

66. The minister, if no lawful objection be presented, shall then be installed by the Classis or by its committee according to the form for installation in the Liturgy.

Lawful objection held of adequate weight by the classis may, as heretofore stated, prevent the installation of a minister who has accepted an approved call. Without impediment, as quite invariably, the installation may be carried out by the classis or by a committee appointed for the purpose. A meeting of the classis is distinctly preferable, adding weight and dignity to the occasion. A committee, however, is competent to carry out the ceremony. In this an installation differs from an ordination which is never carried out by a committee; classis in formal session alone is qualified for the service of ordination. In installation as in ordination the form in the liturgy must be used. Irregularity in the ceremony is not held to invalidate the action, but a minister or committee or classis would be liable to inquiry and to discipline for any irregular proceeding.

67. When the dissolution of the pastoral relation is desired, a minister of the Classis to which the congregation belongs must be invited to be present at a meeting of the Consistory and superintend the application for such action. Such supervising minister shall attest such application and deliver it to the Classis with a written report upon the subject; this report shall serve as a basis upon which the final action of the Classis shall be founded. If, however, either minister or Consistory shall not join in the application, that fact shall be plainly stated in the report and in

such case no dissolution of the pastoral relation shall be made by the Classis except after a hearing of both minister and Consistory in open Classis and by a vote of two-thirds of the members of Classis present. The president of the Classis shall give ten days' notice of such hearing to both parties and the warrant for such notice and for the call of Classis shall be the report of the super-vising minister.

The dissolving of relation between a minister and a church is by action of classis. The matter is taken up on application from the consistory or, it may be, from the minister alone. Quite invariably, the minister having made known his wish to accept another call or enter upon different work or retire from active work, the consistory votes the application in formal session. It must invite another minister of the classis to be present at the meeting and to super-intend the proceeding, as in case of the making of a call, in order that this representative of the classis may fully understand the matter and that he may give advice if there be occasion for it. It may be that the consistory does not wish to vote the application, so strongly wishes the minister to remain, so strongly thinks that this is right, that it refuses to make the request to the classis. On the other hand, it may be that the consistory wishes to request a dissolution of the relation and the minister does not assent, does not join in it.

The visiting minister attests the application and presents it to the classis with a written report, opening fully the way for action. If consistory and minister have united in the application, it will naturally be granted agreeably and at once. A majority vote of the classis would suffice. If the application is either from consistory or minister without the other, possibly the classis would at once refuse to grant the dissolution. There can be no favorable action, no dissolution granted, until after a hearing of both in open classis, of which ten days' notice shall have been given, and by a two-thirds vote of the members of classis present. Such hearing should also be quite surely held even if the classis is at once ready to refuse the application. It is more than likely that the classis would dissolve the relation even though one of the parties

did not join in the application. There may be circumstances which make a refusing advisable. There may appear to be elements of serious unfairness to which concession should not be made. There may be circumstances which point toward a united application later on and a happier dissolving of the relation than could be at the moment.

The fact that virtually every request for a dissolving of the pastoral relation is a united request, however undesired by either party, and sure of being granted by classis, sometimes leads to an actual departing of the minister from the church, the residence and work there, before the classis has acted. Such assuming of favorable action, such forestalling of it, such breaking of relation before the ending of the call-contract by the only authority over it, the classis, is an extreme breach of good order. Under no circumstance should it occur.

The question may arise whether the classis on its own initiative could dissolve a pastoral relation, could act without any application coming before it. Apparently it could. The General Synod in 1806 (358, 384) said that classis could dissolve the relation on its own deciding that it was expedient. In 1807 it reversed this, saying that the articles, 1792, apparently did not sustain it. This adverse position was maintained by the constitution, 1833. The constitution, 1874, gave to classis the apparently unqualified right of dissolving the pastoral relation. In the constitution, 1916, section 85, the power of "dismissing" ministers given the classis apparently means the power of "dissolving" pastoral relation; it is without qualifying clause; right of classis to dissolve the relation at only its own motion for expediency's sake is, therefore, fairly to be assumed; it might have to come before the civil courts for decision. This section, 67, premises an application; and the courts of New York State have sustained the right of classis to dissolve the relation when one of the parties has not united in the application.

68. A majority of the Consistory regularly convened shall be a quorum for the transaction of business.



The meetings of consistory in virtually all details are left to a determining by the local body. A majority of the members must be a quorum and a regular convening is necessary for the transaction of business. A regular convening means due notice to every member in due time. The notice need not necessarily be in writing unless a consistory so determines for itself. It may also determine that the calling must be certain days in advance. Regular meetings at stated times being usually appointed by a consistory, notice of each meeting may not be necessary; it is advisable. Notice of regular or special meeting is usually given from the pulpit. Notice of special meeting, even regular meeting also, may most wisely be given in writing; its giving by personal word may be in the custom of any consistory a regular convening if surely given to every member sufficiently in advance. It is important, however, if business to be transacted is of special moment, involves legal relations or controversy, that the meeting in point be at the regular time, called in writing well in advance; it must not in any case contravene rules of the consistory itself.

69. It shall be the duty of the Consistory when an election has been omitted at the usual time to appoint another time for that purpose on an early date, giving the usual notice. The Consistory may similarly arrange for the filling of vacancies.

An election of officers may have been omitted for any one of many reasons, any extraordinary circumstance. It should not happen for any trivial reason or because of any personal preference unless there is entire assent. Objection and even serious difficulty may arise later on, some questioning of legal sort. If the members of consistory agree ahead of time on an omitting of the election at the set time, they would give due notice and probably no dissent would appear. Extreme weather may at the moment prevent any convening for election. By inadvertence the meeting may not have been called, or may have been called for a wrong time. For whatever reason omitted, the consistory must not allow the election to be omitted altogether or for any considerable time; it must fix an early date, give due notice, and hold the elec-

tion. This is not imperative in the case of a vacancy however created, perhaps by death or resignation; in this case the consistory may arrange a special election but, as already stated, is not required to do so.

70. A Consistory regularly convened may invite a minister of its own Classis to preside at any meeting of the Consistory, when in its judgment circumstances shall make the presiding of its own minister inadvisable.

The presiding of a minister of the classis not the pastor, at the invitation of the consistory, may be at the meeting which votes the invitation or at a later meeting. The invitation must be voted by consistory regularly convened, not agreed upon informally. The presiding of the pastor at a given meeting may be inadvisable in the judgment of the consistory for any one of several reasons, agreeable or not agreeable. The elders and deacons may wish to discuss and decide some matter potentially very agreeable to their pastor, will be more free to do so with him absent. It may be some matter of disfavor toward the pastor. It may be some matter in which he is personally concerned, of undetermined bearing, but more freely dealt with in his absence. It may be a matter which the consistory wish to discuss with their pastor in the presence of another minister and under his presiding. In any case the visiting minister is there to direct, to advise, to help, to insure the proprieties and keep all proceedings in accord with the constitution.

It would appear that the pastor must be informed of the meeting, have the privilege of attending if he wishes to do so. In some formal situations, as in the uniting or not uniting in application for dissolving of pastoral relation, there is reference to the consistory as a party distinct from the minister. It is impossible, however, to think of the consistory's membership as made up without the installed minister, or to think of a meeting as regularly convened without notice to him. Usually he would not wish to attend; usually it would be personally arranged that he remain absent; under some circumstances it might be right that the meeting be regularly convened in his absence from home. But if no-

tice to the minister be omitted, the meeting can hardly be one regularly convened. Nor could he well be excluded if he felt that in his own proper interest or for the welfare of the church he ought to be present.

71. Special meetings of Consistory may be called by the president when deemed necessary, and must be called by him at the request of three members of the Consistory. The president of the Consistory shall preserve a distinct and careful register of every baptism performed and every marriage celebrated and a further complete record of all admissions to membership in full communion; of all dismissions to other churches; and of all deaths of members. It shall be the duty of the several Consistories to make a statistical report at the meeting of the Classis immediately preceding the stated meetings of the Particular and General Synods. Such reports shall comply with the requirements which the General Synod may formulate and shall be accompanied by such comment on the spiritual state of the congregation as the Consistory may deem proper.

It is the privilege of the minister or of an elder, president *pro tem.* of the consistory, to call a special meeting; he must call it when three members of consistory request it; no manner or time of call is specified.

The provision concerning records is of extreme importance. It is required that the president of consistory, that is primarily the minister, keep certain foremost items of record, baptisms, marriages, admissions, dismissions, deaths. He may not wish to do so; he may perhaps have some one to do for him the actual clerical work and be obedient to the law. But the charge is upon him. Normally the minister will wish to keep the record; it is of vital concern to him; he will wish it to be absolutely accurate and complete. The importance of accuracy and completeness cannot be over-stated and, more, the importance of legibility and neatness. For immediate use and on down through the years the church and the minister must cherish these records. They compose much of church history. It is a good thing if at periods they can be put in print. In legal and civil transactions these records sometimes have determining weight, especially the early records of a time when civil records, vital statistics, were not kept as they now are. The book, like the book of

minutes heretofore referred to, must be well cared for. It is wise perhaps that it be large enough to cover many years but, whether in use or a book of past time, it should be in safest possible keeping. The current record should be immediately available, however, for the recording of items at once before they possibly pass out of mind, be wholly omitted. The record should be chronological; a duplicate record, alphabetical, is very desirable and useful.

The record of baptism should include date, place, name, name of father, maiden name of mother, names of sponsors if any, date of birth. If the baptism is in a family of another church, report of it should be given that church for inserting in its record rather than in the record of the minister's church. The record of marriage should include date, place, names, ages, residences, witnesses. The record of admissions to the church should include date, name, received by letter or confession—with space left for note of dismissal, to what church, or death, with date in each case, or other appropriate completing of the record. Space also should be had for the recording of maiden name with married name or the later adding of married name, as the case may be.

The minister usually keeps, in addition, his own personal book of record, similar to the church's; he ought always to do so. It becomes the full record of vital things in his whole ministry. It is the record of a past church carried with him for important reference when he may have gone to another church. A baptism performed in other church than his own, for example, is thus not lost from the story of that period of his ministry. The mere list of names and dates in their several connections is largely the story of his life work, always to be valued.

The statistical report required by the constitution is more often prepared by the minister than by any other member of the consistory. He presumably has the records in his hands, has written them, and will insure accuracy in their transmitting. The General Synod prescribes the form, sometimes changes it, of the table which must be prepared; copies of it are provided. Particular care is called for sometimes in

connection with certain rather vaguely understood items, adherents, absent members, revisions of roll, concerning which instructions may from time to time be given. General Synod in 1898 (145) directed revision of roll in 1900 and every five years thereafter. Any remarks added as to the spiritual state of the congregation need to be not only sincere but if possible somewhat specific, not the general statement of usual condition which may be virtually repeated year by year. Whether prepared by minister or other officer, the report should come before the consistory, be approved and made its own before it is sent on to the classis. At that time, or perhaps preferably after its reception by the classis and return, it should be read to the congregation.

72. A Consistory which finds it desirable to maintain public worship under its direction in more than one place or pulpit in any locality may secure the services of a competent minister or ministers under contract, without a formal call, but only with the approval of Classis and on the admission of such minister or ministers into the Classis in the usual way.

This provision, not existing in earlier times, serves the desire of some churches to have more than one minister without installing more than one, serves their proper occasion for doing so. An associate or assistant is desired when installation does not seem necessary or wise, when the work is small or temporary, or the person in mind is not likely to remain long. Such a man, then, may be secured by a consistory by employment or contract without a formal call. It can be done only with the approval of classis specifically given and the minister must come into the classis as a member of it. These requirements possibly are not always observed. A church, a consistory, may sometimes proceed to employ for part of its work or some place of its service a minister, not calling him and not placing the matter before classis and not seeing to it that he becomes a member of the classis. This is irregular, should never occur. The consistory may employ an unordained man, a theological student, a lay worker, for some service without such relation to the classis; such service by a candidate would deserve the official attention of the classis.



73. Every Consistory shall keep minutes of its meetings and proceedings, and shall lay them before the Classis whenever the Classis shall require.

The requiring of record of proceedings is here repeated, already set forth in section 56. Excellence of record and utmost care of it have been already emphasized. It must be laid before classis when classis asks it; there may be some situation or transaction of the church which calls for examination, some important item which should be exactly and fully known, or some irregularity which needs comment or correcting. This provision is a setting forth of what was not meant but was widely thought to have been meant in the constitution, 1874: "Every consistory . . . shall lay such minutes so far as the same relate to ecclesiastical proceedings at least once a year before the classis." This meant the elders' minutes as now dealt with in section 79.

74. A Consistory may with the approval of Classis combine with one or more neighboring Consistories in making calls and in having a minister to serve in common. Such combination may be broken only with the consent and approval of the Classis.

This does not mean a merging of churches or even a uniting in one call upon a minister. It means a call by two, or even more, churches separately upon the same minister. It means that one minister is called to be the pastor of more than one church, to preach regularly to more than one congregation. Such an arrangement can be made only with the approval of classis. A prior resolution to this effect by the classis would no doubt be usual and desirable. The calls would come before the classis in any case and the approval of them by the classis would be in effect an approval of the associated action. Such an arrangement may be an excellent thing; it should maintain probably more often than it does. A parish is small, involving modest work and affording modest salary; a like church is not far away; associating, they can have their work well done and they can provide fair support for the minister. In fact churches often remain continuously without any pastor when without such arrangement. The question which may be difficult is that of alternate

preaching appointments; an alternating of Sundays is probably not wise; an alternating of morning and afternoon or evening calls for wisdom, graciousness, concession. Such combination, made, cannot be ended without classis' approval.

75. The elders with the ministers alone have a voice in admitting members to full communion; in dismissing them to other churches; in exercising discipline upon those who have erred from the faith or offended in morals; and in choosing delegates to attend the Classis.

This provision is a virtual re-statement of section 40. It is the elders not the consistory who act in all this field, admitting, dismissing, and, if need be, disciplining members. The question arises whether an admitting or dismissing of members can be delegated by the elders to the minister. A vote of the elders giving general authority to the minister, or to clerk perhaps, to give a letter of dismission when asked is quite usual no doubt. Such a vote concerning admissions seems excluded in all ordinary circumstance by the words of the next section, 76: "only those . . . who have made a confession . . . before . . . the elders." It is reasonable to urge that the same exclusiveness apply to dismissions. Ordinarily an immediate action by the minister would involve no embarrassment; and often quick action is desired. On the other hand, there may be some reason why the letter should be delayed, some possible objection, or the possibility of retaining a member who may be hastily or unwisely asking transfer to another church. The matter should come before the elders. A meeting can be quickly held; or a little delay will not be serious.

It is quite sure that in the admitting of a member there will have been a prior conference of the minister with him, a hearing of his faith and experience, an encouraging of him to come before the elders with expectation of being received. In some extraordinary situation, perhaps extreme illness or sudden departing on far journey, the minister usually would not hesitate to receive a confession of faith formally and thereafter ask the elders to receive the member on the confession privately made. Here is also reference

to section 50: "One elder shall be delegated by each consistory" to the classis. Only the elders vote in choosing this delegate.

76. Only those persons may be received as members of the church in full communion who have made a confession of their faith in the Lord Jesus Christ before the minister, if any, and elders; or who have a satisfactory certificate of their membership in full communion of some evangelical church. The names of all persons who have been received as members shall be published to the church, and they shall be registered as regular members.

Persons are received as members of the church who have made a confession of their faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. This is the test. However desirable may be large knowledge of the doctrines of the church and sympathy with them, however largely and graciously there may be inquiry by elders or minister as to them, this is not the test. A sincere trust in Christ, with its inseparable purpose to serve him, is the real simplicity of the church's requirement. Section 40 uses, however, the words, "pass upon the fitness" of those who would be received. There may be a somewhat determining inquiry as to other things which may or may not sustain the confession as sincere and credible. It is not amiss to ask whether one or another habit of life maintains which is, or is generally regarded as, inconsistent with the Christian profession. It is not amiss to ask whether there is a definite purpose to be an attentive and cooperating member of the particular church. It is not amiss to ask one's understanding of the Lord Jesus Christ, faith in whom he confesses. The forms for adult baptism and the reception of baptized members into full communion are suggestive.

A person also is received as member of the church who presents certificate from other church. It is a certificate of membership and it is a certificate of dismissal as a member from the one church to the other. It is the certificate and membership of some evangelical church. There has been a general understanding of what an evangelical church is; in recent times there may have been a tendency to vari-

ance as to it; if the question be raised, it is apparently for the elders before whom a letter in point appears to judge for themselves whether it is from an evangelical church or not; in general a fine phrasing identifying the evangelical church may be that used more than once in the constitution, a church that holds to the "Gospel of the Grace of God in Christ Jesus." The letter must be a satisfactory one, that is the elders must be satisfied with the form and substance of it. There is no set form common to all the denominations; there is no single form required for all the Reformed Church in America although a form is officially approved and suggested. A certificate may be unsatisfactory because irregular or incomplete in some way. It may be unsatisfactory because it adds to the formal dismission words of information or explanation which may prejudice the member named in the judgment of the elders to whom it is addressed. It is a perfectly regular certificate but it does not stop there. Ordinarily, quite invariably, the elders would have no thought other than to act favorably upon a letter presented. They do not have to receive the letter or the member if they do not consider it expedient to do so. The certificate may be in wholly regular form with no prejudicing of it in any way; but the elders may be aware of facts which make admission of the party named not in the interest of the church, facts which make them doubtful of the person's worthiness as a church member at all; they have unquestioned right to act unfavorably, to save the church from what they consider will be a detriment. They have to reckon with the question of expediency, however, as well as authority and preference.

The words, "full communion," do not occur in the Rules of Dort, 1619, but they appear in the articles, 1792, and thereafter. By certificate, baptized members may also be received—as such; as members in full communion are received as communicant members. There would rarely be such transfer in the case of baptized persons who in maturity have not come into full communion; someone might ask it and properly receive it. With children it ought to be

more active than it is, ought to be invariable. When parents are given letters from one church to another there should be named with them their baptized children, dismissed as such with their parents.

The names of all persons admitted into the church whether by confession or certificate must be not only written in the church record book as already noted but must be also read to the congregation. This is usually done at the communion service, the admission of members usually taking place just before that service. It ought never to be forgotten, however, that any time is a good time to receive members and that possibly the church is in error in confining its receiving of members so exclusively to the communion seasons. No ceremony is necessary at the public announcing of new members; an optional ceremony is set forth in the liturgy and it or one similar is in widespread use.

77. Membership in the church may be terminated only by death, or by dismissal to another church, or by a procedure of discipline. A member whose address has been unknown for two years may be placed upon an absent-list. The ministers and elders are charged to impress upon members of the church who remove from the bounds of one church to those of another the duty of obtaining from Consistory a certificate of their membership and of dismissal.

There are three ways in which church membership is terminated, three only, death, dismissal, discipline. There is no right of withdrawal, the terminating of membership by a person at will even with the approval of the elders. Argument is not wanting that this privilege ought to maintain; there is a natural disposition to consider it appropriate and in distinct ways a desirable thing for both member and church. Reflection quite surely brings conviction that it would be unwise and unfortunate. At the start of church membership the stress must be upon faith and the church as a life-long enterprise; were it dealt with as a situation to be perhaps brief, to be set aside as disposition suggested, incalculable value would be gone from the confession and from the concept of the Christian life. More, if the privilege of withdrawal maintained, a countless succession of



members would be leaving the church, moved perhaps by religious doubt, or discouragement, or shame, or worldly impulse, who, continuing in the church, are constantly and confidently expected to return to their earlier satisfaction in the service of the church.

An absent list is now authorized. The elders may place a member absent two years on such a list; they are not compelled to do so. This has advantage in keeping compact and distinct the resident and so co-worshiping and co-working membership, of not presenting the local church in various connections as larger and stronger than it really is. It is a disadvantage if it gives the absent member the impression that he is not fully and responsibly a member of the church and if the list assumes an aspect of permanence, neither member nor church looking for prompt elimination from it. The "absent member" must in no case be regarded as less than full member, the same as one still in residence. He must be followed up. His worship and work in a church of his local residence should be made sure if possible. If the membership is not terminated, communication should not be terminated. Losses from known church membership are beyond count through the removal of members from home church and failure to take their membership to church of their new locality. Sometimes it is because of uncertainty or brevity of any local stay. Sometimes it is because of simple neglect, lack of interest. Sometimes after a long absence and long intermission of known church membership an old time member, unknown in residence even to the home church, is stirred to revive the old relation and writes asking for a certificate. It is to be always remembered that while word of the circumstance may be added to the given letter, the declaring that the person is not a member and therefore eligible to no letter is not a valid position for the elders to take.

The charge is laid upon minister and elders to make clear to removing members the duty of transferring church membership; it should be done at once in all but exceptional cases; there may be valid reasons for some or even pro-

longed delay. (The obsolete use of the word, consistory, occurs again here.) The letter of dismissal should name the church to which the member is dismissed. The elders should not give a letter of blanket address for presenting to any church to be later chosen by the member named. Such a letter is subject to unapproved use, and, more likely, it may never be presented to any church. In addressing letter of dismissal to a church, there should be appended a request or form for answer, for a certifying by the church addressed that the letter and the member have been received. There should be no uncertainty about this, for, until the member is received by the second church, he remains fully a member of the first church; if the letter is never presented the old status remains unchanged.

If a letter of dismissal is asked, the church through its elders must give it or must place itself in position where the refusing of the letter becomes lawful and justified. In the judgment of the elders the member may be unworthy, undeserving of a letter to other church; then they should proceed to place him under discipline, withholding the letter. Or, placing him under discipline, it may be appropriate to dismiss him as under discipline; it is not necessary that the certificate say that he is in good and regular standing. Or, thinking the situation not serious enough to call for discipline, the elders may give a usual letter of direct dismissal, adding on the certificate some informing and explanatory words; perhaps such addition might better be in a separate letter either formal or personal accompanying the certificate. Ordinarily when a valued member is dismissed, it is desirable that some words of affection and recommendation be added.

78. A faithful and solemn inquiry is to be made by the minister and the elders before each celebration of the Lord's Supper, whether to the knowledge of those present any member in full communion has departed from the faith or has behaved unworthily of the Christian profession. Such as are amenable to discipline for any reason may be rebuked or admonished, and if necessary suspended from the privilege of the Lord's Table.

This inquiry is regarded as so important that it appears

in the list of matters to be annually reported upon to the classis by each church. It is to be earnest and solemn, not careless or perfunctory. The point primarily is the protecting of the Lord's Supper from those who ought not come to it; the more pressing concern in the church of today is the faithful attention to erring members, to advise them, correct them, and renew them in all good confession and life. In times past and in some places the custom prevailed of giving a token to the worthy and expected communicants; without the token no one was received at the table; such custom would hardly fit the circumstance of today. In some places at some time the custom of visitation of members by the elders before the communion service has been active, a ministry of preparation; it would be a happy thing if such custom might prevail in the church of today. The question required by the constitution has its measure of value, has its very great value if dealt with as intended and as always possible. The roll of church members should be printed for general use and it surely should be in the hands of the elders at the meeting before communion. Members recently admitted, especially the youth, should have closest and most sympathetic attention.

Objection is sometimes made that this requirement is unwise and wrong on the ground that it is without sincerity and that it is in general altogether futile. The question is asked; negative answer is given, or affirmative answer is given without any sequent action; the proceeding is without substance or good service. The reply is, if the objection come from minister or elder, that any such insincerity or futility lies at the door of the officers, not at the words of the constitution; that the words ask sincerity and serious attention and in this are not asking too much. It is further to be answered that the constitution does not require that specific and concrete action follow upon the asking of the question; it says that a member may be dealt with in way of discipline, not that he must be. The elders, if the answer be that there is unworthiness, have the problem to deal with, whether to proceed, how to proceed, what is expedient,

what will be the greatest Christian service to the member and to the church. In any case it will be borne in mind that the asking of the question is part of the law to which the officers are subject, that, like the preaching attention to the Heidelberg Catechism, it is part of the minister's accepted obligation.

The two lines along which the inquiry runs are those of departure from the faith and unworthiness of behaviour. The former may be active or passive unbelief; the latter may be major or minor offence. A church may very happily have nothing to really disturb it as the times of inquiry come and go. Often the mention of a name is best followed by an only personal and very gracious word of minister or elder to the member named. Sometimes definite formal action ought not to be avoided. In the listing of appropriate official acts it is not quite clear whether "rebuked" and "admonished" mean the same act or different acts and, if different, what the difference is. Section 132 lists the several acts of discipline known to the church as admonition, suspension (from membership or office), deposition from office, and excommunication. The use of the word, rebuked, here and of the word, censure, elsewhere in the constitution is not clear in its identity with or difference from the use of the word, admonition, in the definite list of the lawful forms of discipline. It is also to be noticed that in this section the phrase is "suspended from the privilege of the Lord's Supper." It is fair to assume that the words are used without intending any difference from the words in the formal list of disciplines, section 132, "suspended from church membership." The elders, after their inquiry prior to the communion, may with wisdom informally express to a member their disapproval of him and even advise his remaining away from the Lord's Supper on an immediate occasion; but, if formal discipline be in point, the elders must pursue the regular order of process and trial prescribed by the constitution before applying the formal penalty of admonition or of suspension from church membership.

The time of the elders' meeting before the communion is

not specified. In most churches it is only two or three days before, being appointed for hour adjacent to the hour of the usual preparatory service.

79. The minister shall preside at all meetings of the elders except as otherwise provided. A majority of ministers and elders regularly convened shall be a quorum for the transaction of business. The elders shall keep minutes of their meetings and proceedings and shall lay them before the Classis at least once a year.

The minister, president of consistory, normally presides over the elders at their meeting with him. It may be otherwise provided—by vote of the elders presumably, they taking necessary action in some special circumstance. The minister's presiding at the meetings of consistory and of elders suggests his presiding also at any congregational meeting; there is nothing to dictate this, however; the consistory would naturally decide, naming the minister or someone else in its discretion; it might ask someone not an officer to preside or ask the congregation to choose its own presiding officer. A majority is quorum in the elders' meeting as in consistory meeting; the minister is included in the count.

The elders must keep their minutes distinct from those of the consistory. They should not be kept in the same book. The elders may name a clerk. Or the minister may keep the record. The minutes of the elders must be laid before the classis for inspection annually, differing in this from the minutes of consistory which must be laid before the classis only when asked for.

80. The deacons in addition to their stated obligations shall perform such other duties as may be assigned to them from time to time by the Consistory. They shall keep minutes of their meetings and proceedings when they meet as a separate body, and shall render an account in Consistory of their collection and distribution of alms and benevolent offerings. A majority of the deacons regularly convened shall be a quorum for the transaction of business.

In many, if not most, churches the deacons do not have separate meetings or keep minutes of their own. It is not required as it is required of the elders. Often their particular business is transacted in a few minutes at time of a



meeting of consistory or even as of the consistory itself in connection with the almoner's report. Account of their finances must be rendered to the consistory. It would mean increased service to the church usually if they did meet in regular or occasional separate sessions. Their duties as of their distinct office may be variously enlarged as already suggested. A usual duty in addition to taking the offerings at church services is the passing of the elements at the Lord's Supper. Another usually and very properly is that of acting as ushers, presence at the church well in advance of service hour, the giving of such attention to the arriving congregation, visitors or members, as occasion may suggest.

## ARTICLE VII

### OF THE CLASSIS

SECTION 85. The special prerogatives of a Classis are the examination of students of theology for licensure and of candidates for the ministry; a general superintendence over the interests of the several churches within its bounds; and the general enforcement of the requirements of the Constitution among its churches. It shall have the power of approving and disapproving calls; of ordaining, installing, dismissing, suspending and deposing ministers; of forming and disbanding churches; of approving and dissolving combinations of two or more churches; and shall exercise an appellate supervising power over the acts, proceedings and decisions of its Consistories, both in temporal matters and those which relate to Christian discipline.

The "special prerogative" of classis is a phrase in the constitution, 1874, attaching with one particular function of classis, the examining and ordaining of candidates for the ministry. It is here extended to cover all the functions of classis. The earlier limited reference had some significance. It emphasized a cardinal office and the limiting of its exercise to the one ecclesiastical body. In still earlier days the synod was also authorized to examine and ordain. This is no longer so; and of course a consistory or congregation cannot examine with authority or ordain. The words, special prerogative, gave rise some years ago to a contention urgently argued that the classis, so especially endowed, could examine and ordain whomsoever it would—without restrictions. Certain classes proceeded on this theory. The contention could not prevail; and it is now nowhere questioned that this peculiar prerogative is subject to the provisions of the constitution, that examination of students and ordination of candidates shall take place only under given circumstances with certain antecedents.

The broad office of the classis is expressed in the words

“general superintendence” over the churches and general enforcement of the constitution within its boundaries. That this oversight should be more immediate and complete than it usually is cannot be questioned. Churches are often allowed to go their own way to detriment of their own welfare and of the denomination and of religion, somewhat because the classis is not attentive enough and not active enough. It should not indeed be intrusive or meddlesome. Home rule is vastly important and of right. But the episcopal functions of the classis are large and they are clear; in some aspects they surpass the authority of a bishop in a church of the episcopal government. They impose responsibility and it should be faithfully fulfilled. A waning for any reason of the welfare of a church or a church’s disregard of the constitution or a church’s foolish use or waste of its resources should have prompt and discreet attention by the classis as a whole or by its appointed officer or committee.

The specific powers recited as to calls and the status of ministers and churches are apparently very broad, conditioned of course by any other provisions of the constitution which bear upon them. In the exercise of these powers, legal question or action arising and ordinary law being not contravened, the classis is sustained by the civil courts as simply applying the constitution to which churches and ministers, as well as the classis itself, are subject by virtue of their membership in the denomination.

In past times the Particular Synod as well as the classis could act on calls, approve or disapprove them; this is no longer so. The classis may for any reason approve or disapprove a call, form or disband a church, approve or dissolve combinations of churches. It is the only body—consistory and synod not qualified—to ordain, install, dismiss to other body, suspend, or depose a minister. In disbanding a church, this being fully in the power of the classis, the property values are to be carefully studied and conserved and deposited in some holding of the denomination, preferably perhaps with trustees of the classis. In the constitu-

tion, 1833, it was provided that a classis could or should define the boundaries of a congregation or congregations; this provision no longer exists, some attention to such question, however, being fairly a part of the general superintendence always in point. The classis has no power to dismiss a church either to another classis or to any other ecclesiastical body.

The classis with its power of dismissal may dismiss a minister to another classis or to other ecclesiastical body. There is no set and required form of certificate for this; a form is suggested and is usual. The certificate may well include any expressions of affection and fraternal feeling that are appropriate. It may include some informing or explanatory statement, commendatory or prejudicial; such added word may perhaps be more wisely in a separate accompanying letter. If a letter is asked and the minister is in good and regular standing, it cannot with propriety be refused. The classis or other body to which the letter is addressed may, for reason which seems to it adequate, refuse to receive the letter and the minister named. So long as he is not received he remains in his old connection. A request or blank should be attached to the letter, asking return word that the person named has been received or has not been received. The General Synod in 1834 (322), when question arose whether a classis could dismiss a minister to a body of denomination in no ecclesiastical intercourse with the Reformed Church, expressed itself in the affirmative. The words "no ecclesiastical intercourse" may be subject to different understandings. The classis would be, essentially, its own judge as to the church bodies which it was justified in addressing in the dismissal of a minister.

The classis as a judicatory is the appellate court before which may come from elders, consistories, churches proceedings of both spiritual and temporal sort.

86. At least three ministers and three elders are required to constitute a Classis or to form a quorum at any meeting.

87. Each Classis shall appoint delegates to attend Particular Synod at the regular meeting which precedes that of the Synod

to which it belongs, and shall nominate thereto its delegates to General Synod.

A majority, constituting quorum in consistory and in elders' meeting, is not necessary in classis; three ministers and three elders constitute a quorum. This is the minimum number for the constituting of a classis or the continuing of it; a substantially greater number is quite invariably available before a classis is constituted.

The classis appoints delegates to the synods in accordance with section 50. Should the appointment for any reason fail to be accomplished at the regular meeting preceding the meeting of the Particular Synod, it is to be assumed that appointment at a special meeting thereafter of due notice and regularity would not be considered as irregular and invalid. It will be noted that the delegates to the General Synod, nominated by and coming from the classes, are not the delegates of the classes. The words, its delegates, plainly mean the Particular Synod's delegates.

88. The Classis shall appoint one of its ministers as supervisor of all proceedings of the Consistory of any vacant church belonging to the Classis, until a regular pastor shall have been installed.

This is a new provision in the constitution, 1916, and a very important one. It is an immediate and substantial exercise of the episcopal function of the classis. A vacant church, a church without a minister, is to have a representative of the classis in direct oversight of it and of all proceedings of its consistory. One of the ministers of the classis is to be appointed supervisor. The appointment should be made at once. A minister most apt through nearness or familiarity or personal acceptance should be chosen; the choice should not be hasty or without good judgment. However aware at once of the appointment, the church and the minister should receive formal word of it without delay from the stated clerk. Communication should be established at once through the initiative of either consistory or supervisor. It is an excellent plan that the consistory invite the supervisor to preach in its pulpit, thus to meet the congregation, at a very early date.



The circumstances may be such that any very close or constant communication is unnecessary or inexpedient; or they may be such that close and constant touch should be maintained. The most immediate item of the common interest is the supply of the pulpit and the search for a minister. It may well be that the church has its immediate and entirely appropriate idea as to whom it wants for its Sunday services; or it may desire supplies which are not the most appropriate or wise. The supervisor may readily let the matter take its own course if wise, or may give a quiet warning as to possible unwise, or may direct toward available supply, as the case may be. The church may have idea or come a little later to definite idea as to whom it wants as pastor, a wise choice; or it may be advancing in this matter along line evidently not promising or discreet; or it may be and may continue to be quite at loss. In any case advice may be welcome; in some case advice will be necessary. The word of the supervisor is not to be intrusive or dictatorial; it is to be tactful and fraternal. But the supervisor's position should be recognized as not only advisory and cooperative but also as carrying the dignity and authority of the classis.

No major matter should be undertaken by the consistory without an advising with the supervisor. All ordinary concerns of the church, as occasions arise, may be served by the supervisor, matters of organization, of support, of benevolence, of visitation. He is supervisor of "all proceedings." Sometimes he may be the necessary and effectual composer of differences in the church, a healer of personal ill-feeling, an inspirer of right feeling and concord.

The supervisor may be in position most readily and acceptably to fulfill particular services for which a minister is invited at personal choice of members of the congregation, such as marriages and funerals. The communion service should be especially in his thought, to be in his charge or under such advice from him as the consistory may desire.

89. The president of the Classis at the same meeting at which delegates to the Synods are appointed and nominated shall put the following inquiries to the ministers and elders of each Consistory and the several answers shall be entered in the minutes of Classis for the information of the higher judicatories:

(a) Are the doctrines of the Gospel preached in your church in their purity in conformity with the Word of God and the Standards of the Reformed Church in America?

(b) Are the points of doctrine contained in the Heidelberg Catechism explained from time to time in your church as required in the Constitution of the Reformed Church in America?

(c) Is the education of the young people in the essential truths of the Word of God by catechising or otherwise faithfully attended to in your congregation?

(d) Is pastoral visitation faithfully performed in your congregation?

(e) Do the minister and elders carefully inquire before each celebration of the Lord's Supper concerning the conduct of members as required in the Constitution?

(f) Is the contract regarding temporal matters between the ministers and church fulfilled?

(g) Are contributions made annually by your church to each of the benevolent boards and funds of the Reformed Church in America?

This is a procedure peculiar to the Reformed Church and of pronounced value. It emphasizes certain things regarded as of paramount importance in the work of the ministry and of the church. It is an annually occurring concrete reminder of things which, important as they are, may have passed into the background. It creates responsible opportunity for the classis to ascertain the situation and custom of a local church, to approve and confirm, or to disapprove and warn. The minister and the elder of each consistory are to give answer to the inquiries made. They may give the same answers or they may disagree in answer to one question or another. The answers called for are not necessarily more than Yes or No. An elder or a minister may give answer in other form and may add further words if he wishes. The General Synod in 1892 (567) so recognized. The questions may be asked in any convenient way, either each church in order with all questions or each question in order with all churches. The answers must be recorded in the minutes of

the classis. They thus come before the higher judicatory, the Particular Synod, at the annual laying of the record book before that body. Refusal to answer is a disregard of the church's oversight and authority, contumacy which may deserve the executive or judicial attention of the classis.

It is not required that the classis take any particular action or any action whatever sequent to the inquiries and replies. It is to be assumed that the questions are for useful purpose and that the classis is to act if and as it deems useful and expedient or necessary. Sympathy and advice may be in order relative to some difficulty which has been revealed. Encouragement may be given in view of some improved condition appearing. Rebuke for failure to fulfill obligations or appropriate service may be called for and is perhaps too often omitted. Procedure of actual discipline might be forced upon a quite unwilling classis.

The questions themselves are major questions, quite clear, needing little comment or explanation. The first question concerns the faithfulness to the gospel, stressed in the minister's call, section 65. The second question concerns the attention to the Heidelberg Catechism, also stressed in the call and set forth further in section 25. The third question gives emphatic place to catechizing, also set forth in the call, but recognizes other avenues of instruction, in the Sunday-school or elsewhere; the catechizing may be in the Sunday-school and may be by other than the minister; it is best done in the special catechetical class, by the minister. The fourth question emphasizes the great pastoral function of the minister, also stated in the call and often sadly secondary to the work of preaching; it may be done, however, by an assistant minister; or the fulfilling of it may be reduced in place and time by visitation of elders, church visitor, or staff of congregational helpers. The fifth question is a reminder of the requirement, possibly thought negligible by some, set forth in section 78. The sixth question recognizes the civil contract aspect of the call and gives opportunity for any shortcoming in its fulfillment, arrears of salary perhaps, to come to the attention of the classis without the

minister voluntarily presenting it; its appearing by his word and the elder's is compelled; the righting of a wrong situation thus often becomes promptly possible. The seventh question relates to the specially organized benevolent enterprises of the denomination, foreign missions, domestic missions, education, publication and Bible-school, ministerial relief and pension fund; in general, the churches should all contribute to all these causes at their chosen times; a church may not be able to do so; it should work toward the full order of benevolence; however excellent other appealing causes may be, not distinctly of the denomination, however wisely and widely they may be in the offerings program of a church, they are not referred to in this question; the reference is to boards and funds organized, controlled, and administered by the Reformed Church in America.

90. The stated sessions of the Classis shall be held semi-annually at such times as the Classis itself may determine. There shall be a sermon or devotional exercise or both at every stated session.

While the semi-annual stated sessions of the classis are held at any set times agreeable to the classis, wise custom makes all the classes quite uniform, the appointments being within a few weeks' period in the fall and spring, the spring session almost necessarily appointed for a day not far precedent to the meeting of the Particular Synod. This is the apt time for the making and receiving of the annual reports of the churches. Formerly it was required that a sermon be preached at each stated session; now a devotional service may be held without sermon. It is perhaps of value that the sermon remain in the order of exercises, or that an address on some timely topic of church concern be given instead. The devotional service in any case should not be perfunctory but such as surely to serve the spirit of the session, emphasizing its religious aspect. It may be at any time in the session, perhaps preferably early in it; if it may be at a time when some congregation additional to the classis can be assembled, if local interest in it can be enlisted, it has added value.

91. It shall be the duty of the president of the Classis to call

its members together by circular letter when a special meeting of the Classis is made necessary for an examination, an approval of a call, an ordination, an installation, or any other special business. The president shall also call at any time a special meeting of the Classis on the request in writing of two ministers and two elders belonging to the Classis; at least ten days' notice shall be given of such meeting.

When there is occasion for a special meeting, the president calls it. The stated clerk, who issues notice for regular meeting, might possibly be the agent of the president calling the classis in his name; the president is particularly charged with the matter and the call must be by circular letter. The special business, the occasion for the special meeting, may be any one of the several items here listed or any one of many others which may be known to the president and which presents to him the duty of issuing the call. Or the special business known or unknown to him presents to him simply through the request of two ministers and two elders the duty of issuing the call; when such a request comes, the president is not at liberty to omit summoning the classis. It will be noted that circular letter as the method of call mentioned in the first instance is not mentioned in this second instance; it should properly maintain here also. It will also be noted that the ten days' notice required in the second instance is not mentioned in the first instance; it is wise always to observe it.

92. Every Classis shall keep a book in which the forms of subscription for candidates and ministers of the Gospel are clearly written to which those who are received on examination or on certificate shall subscribe in the presence of the Classis. It shall be the duty of every Classis to report annually to the Particular Synod upon the state of religion within the bounds of the Classis and the names of persons who have been examined and licensed or ordained. The Classis shall also report all admissions and dismissions of ministers, all changes of pastoral relations, and deaths of ministers within its bounds since the last session of the Particular Synod. The report to the Particular Synod shall include such statistics presented in tabular form as the General Synod may from time to time direct.

The book which the classis is required to have with the forms of subscription and the signatures of candidates under



its care and ministers received is usually the minute book of the classis. With the form well written at its beginning and pages left for the signatures—the signing done in the presence of classis—the minutes are carefully recorded thereafter. The book should be of good paper and good binding, large enough to hold the records of many years. Always kept in a safe place, when it is filled and to be put aside it should be deposited in a place of permanent holding where it can be referred to as occasions arise. The annual report of the classis to the Particular Synod on the state of religion consists, in common custom, of excerpts from or synopsis of the reports from the churches; careful study and careful conclusions, however, should surely be characteristic of such report. It includes also statistical tables. Particular care should insure absolute correctness and completeness in the listing of the personal items required by the constitution, list of those licensed, ordained, received, installed, dismissed, the pastoral relations dissolved, and the deaths of ministers.

93. Each Classis shall be governed in its procedure by such rules of order as it shall adopt from time to time and as shall be in harmony with this Constitution.

The right of making its own rules of order and modifying them at any time belongs to the classis. In the rules nothing must be at variance with the constitution. Many classes print their rules of order. It would be an excellent thing if each classis would do this and would have the printing also include the constitution of the Reformed Church, that this entire book of government might be in the hands not only of all the ministers but as well of all the elders and all the deacons and have even some further circulation among the members of the churches.

## ARTICLE VIII

### OF THE PARTICULAR SYNOD

95. The Particular Synod shall exercise a general superintendence over the interests and concerns of the several Classes within its bounds and an appellate supervising power over their acts, proceedings and decisions.

96. Six ministers and six elders shall constitute a quorum of the Particular Synod for the transaction of business.

97. Each Particular Synod shall appoint delegates to attend General Synod at the meeting which precedes that of the General Synod. It shall ordinarily appoint those nominated by the Classes: it may, however, for good reason, appoint other persons than those so nominated; and it shall appoint delegates for any Classis which has made no nomination.

98. The Particular Synod shall have power to transfer a congregation from one Classis to another and to form new Classes.

99. The Particular Synod shall meet annually at such time and place as it may determine.

100. A special meeting may be held for the transaction of business upon the written request of four ministers and four elders, addressed to the president of the Synod. It shall be his duty to give at least three weeks' notice of this meeting, which shall state the particular object for which the Synod is to be convened.

101. A copy of the minutes of every session of the several Classes held since the last regular session of the Particular Synod shall be produced and laid on the table at its annual meeting, for inspection. The Particular Synod shall prepare from the several reports of the Classes a synodical report on the state of religion, which shall be presented to the General Synod accompanied by the statistical tables of the said Classes.

Discussion has arisen at times as to the value in the church order of the Particular Synod, whether the business of the church might not be as well administered, and with some advantage, if it was abolished. The consensus of the church represented in the General Synod has always been against its abolishing. Reports on the subject have occasionally set forth the possible increase of the value and useful-

ness of the synod through the larger use of it as a conference, for the presenting and discussing of addresses on subjects in the field of church life and work. This is gaining as a custom among the synods, special occasions local, historical, institutional often giving special opportunity and significance.

The business itself of the Particular Synod, it may well be argued, is sufficient to justify the body, to make its continued existence and functioning wise and desirable, even necessary. The provisions of the constitution concerning it are brief and clear, calling for little comment. It has the same superintending and appellate relation to the classes that the classis has to the consistories and churches. Its quorum is six ministers and six elders, twice as many as compose a quorum of classis. In appointing delegates to the General Synod it acts upon names proposed by its classes; receiving the nominations from the classes, it may name those nominated or may for reason name others; departure from the classis, unwillingness to serve, or death may compel other appointment; even dissatisfaction for any reason with a nomination could be the occasion for a change by the synod.

The transfer of a congregation—the more proper word is church—from one classis to another may be appropriate for any one of several reasons, especially vicinity, natural relationship, ease of association, equalizing of numbers. Request for it would naturally come from one of the classes in point. It might come from the church concerned. In all ordinary procedure the transfer would not be made unless agreeable to both the classes and to the church. The right of the Particular Synod does not, however, depend upon the request or the desire of classes or church.

If the transfer intended is to classis in a different Particular Synod, the second synod would also have to act. While the right to transfer from classis to classis is positively given, no right is given to transfer a church to any other ecclesiastical body. In past time the right seemed to exist; it was rarely exercised. The General Synod in 1850

(39) spoke of it as an allowed procedure. In 1889 (833) the synod was explicit against it: "The constitution . . . confers no power upon any of its judicatories for the dismissal of churches." If a church insists upon leaving the denomination, it can only be disbanded by the classis, its property being dealt with as laws of church and state provide, and be received or organized by other denomination in such form or proposal of organization as may be possible and may be agreeable to the receiving body.

A new classis which the Particular Synod has right to form might be from churches in existing contiguous classes within its bounds; or churches might be included from classis in a different synod, that synod acting in concert; or it might be in whole or in part of new churches having theretofore no actual or complete classis membership.

The stated meeting is annual. Its time, of its own appointing, is quite invariably in the spring immediately preceding the General Synod. A special meeting is not put at the option or judgment of the president but must have its warrant in the written request of four ministers and four elders. It then becomes the duty of the president to give the notice, to do this three weeks in advance of the appointed time, and to state the business that is to come before the meeting.

As the minutes of the elders of each church must come before the classis, so the minutes of the classis must come before the Particular Synod—for examination, for any necessary comment, for the calling to attention any irregularity. As in the classis the inspection is usually by a committee of one or more. A copy of the minutes is specified. It is the minutes themselves, however, the original and official record that must be presented. The Particular Synod presents to the General Synod a report on the state of religion prepared in the light of the reports from the classes and with it forwards the statistical tables sent to it by the classes and composed of the tables sent to the classes by the churches.

## ARTICLE IX

### OF THE GENERAL SYNOD

105. The General Synod is the highest assembly and judicatory of the Reformed Church in America.

106. The General Synod shall meet annually at such time and place as it shall determine. Twenty-four ministers and twenty-four elders regularly convened shall constitute a quorum for the transaction of business.

107. The General Synod shall have the power to constitute Particular Synods and to make changes in their boundaries. It shall exercise a general superintendence over the interests and concerns of the whole church and an appellate supervising power over the acts, proceedings and decisions of the lower assemblies. It shall have original cognizance of all matters relating to the theological schools, the appointment of Professors and the regulation of their courses of instruction.

The General Synod, the highest assembly and judicatory of the church in the official system—consistory, classis, Particular Synod, General Synod—represents the whole church, is composed of representatives of it, ministers and elders, delegates of all classes appointed by the respective Particular Synods. Its annual meeting, the time and place subject to its own appointment, now convenes on the Thursday after the first Wednesday in June, and not always at the same place. The quorum is twenty-four ministers and twenty-four elders. It is a continuous body; each year there is the session of the one body, not a new General Synod. Members remain members throughout the year, available for call to special session; they are still members after the next annual appointing of new delegates until the convening of the next annual session. The synod has its own rules of order.

The powers of the General Synod are defined much in the manner of the defining of the lower bodies. They are in brief a general superintendence over the whole church and



an appellate supervision over the lower assemblies and judicatories. They are, like those of the lower judicatories, limited by the terms of the constitution. Judicial cases, to reach the General Synod, must come from the Particular Synod; cases in the lower courts cannot come to it direct. It has the same power to constitute Particular Synods and to change them that the Particular Synod has in relation to classes and that the classis has in relation to consistories and churches.

The General Synod, called upon to adjudicate cases formally and in due order before it, does not interpret the constitution or pass upon questions pertinent to the lower judicatories save as concrete cases come before it. Sometimes a positive expression without the concrete case is desired and might seem to be needed; request for it has been denied. In earlier years there were "References" for advice; the articles, 1792, deal with the matter; the constitution in later years does not; General Synod did sometimes give advice in a concrete way when a concrete case was not judicially before it. (Digest: References, Abstract Questions, Advice.) Under the power of general superintendence it seems competent for the General Synod to discuss, whether at its own initiative or not, conditions and activities in the general life of the church and to deal with them as may seem wise within the limits of the constitutional order, conserving all rights of the lower assemblies, and not imposing an interpretation of words of the constitution without case before it demanding its lawful decision.

108. The supervision of the General Synod over the theological schools shall be exercised through Boards of Superintendents. These shall be appointed by the Synod according to such methods and shall have such specific duties as the Synod shall from time to time determine.

A particular field of the General Synod's responsibility and control is that of theological instruction. It has under its authority the creating of a theological seminary, the appointing of its professors and the determining of its courses of study. It exercises its control in large part through imme-

diately functioning bodies. Having appointed professors to compose its faculty, it approves the general scope and contents of the curriculum. The body of professors created by it, however, compose in detail and without undue limitation the work of the several departments. The number of professors, the titles, the active departments, and the general program of one seminary are not necessarily the same as those of another. An independent working out of its own life is the privilege of each under the constitution of the church and the general or specific acts of the General Synod. The supervising office, more immediate than could be exercised by it, it commits to a Board of Superintendents for each seminary. Constituted in way determined by the synod and modified from time to time, this board is in general composed of representatives from the classes and from the Particular Synods most nearly related to the respective institutions. Such board generally has but one stated session a year, holding a special session as occasion may require. It has committees giving special attention to specific items of the seminary's life and welfare. An item of first importance now committed to the Board of Superintendents, not formerly committed to it, is the nominating to the General Synod of professors, as recited in section 31. Other body may be added to the Board of Superintendents for the larger service of the seminary in the discretion of the General Synod. Such body has been created with one and another seminary, Directors in connection with one, Trustees in connection with another, they possessing such powers as the synod has explicitly conferred.

109. The General Synod shall have the power, and it shall be its duty from time to time, to institute, organize and direct such agencies or boards as shall best enable the church to fulfill the command of the Lord Jesus Christ, to teach all nations and preach the Gospel to every creature, and effectively to conduct its missionary, educational and benevolent work. The General Synod shall also recommend such methods in the churches as shall effectively sustain such agencies and tend to secure the largest dissemination of the Gospel.

The power of the General Synod with regard to agencies

and boards is very general and broad. It is a power to institute, organize, and direct as shall best enable the denomination to do its work. This work is expressed in the words, "to fulfill the command of the Lord Jesus Christ to teach all nations and preach the Gospel to every creature." To this end institutions "missionary, educational, and benevolent" are essential. Under this power of the General Synod theological seminaries and their various boards have been established, the Board of Foreign Missions, the Board of Domestic Missions, the Board of Publication and Bible School Work, the various commissions and committees in charge of activities and funds of the denominational enterprise. All of these function at the will and under the control of the General Synod, the members of such subordinate bodies being appointed by it. Such a body may have its own distinct incorporation; it may thus hold property of its own as well as receive the benefit of property held in its behalf by the General Synod.

The duty also rests upon the General Synod of recommending to the churches methods for the best fulfilling of the work for which they are organized, the spread of the Gospel, and for the sustaining of the denominational agencies. Advice and stimulus of this sort are one of the prevailing activities of the synod. The churches need, many definitely depend upon, such utterances from the highest body. The reports from the agencies and the reports from the churches give basis for the appropriate and urgent messages of the synod. Their purpose, their effect, is the greater unifying of the churches in the great single endeavor and the greater advancing of the enterprise to which all are committed. The General Synod is to be alert to new methods of church work appearing from any source in order that, if deserving and promising, they may be commended to all the churches for the welfare of the local work of each.

110. The General Synod shall have power to grant dispensations from a required study or from the professorial certificate in the case of persons preparing for the ministry whom the Classis may recommend for such dispensation.

111. The General Synod upon application from a Classis shall have power to grant a dispensation from the full requirements of the Constitution when it shall be impracticable for that Classis to comply with such requirements in missionary work under its supervision.

This clear stating of the General Synod's power to grant dispensation from required study or professorial certificate to a person seeking to enter the ministry and recommended for such dispensation by the classis repeats the requirement expressed in section 12 and commented upon in connection with that and with preceding sections.

There is added a larger power of dispensation, waiving of requirement, a dispensation from the "full requirements of the constitution." This can be granted, however, only in connection with missionary work under supervision of a classis, the classis of course requesting it. It had its origin many years ago in the desire of the Arcot Mission to license and ordain a native in India. Now it seems a concession in general phrasing of somewhat doubtful value and wisdom. If the missionary work in point were in foreign land under care of classis there, the occasion for such dispensation might seem more apparent. The work in foreign lands is not now under the supervision of classes and therefore is not concerned with this provision. The missionary work at home is alone concerned, such work as is ordinarily under the supervision of the Board of Domestic Missions but also under the supervision of the local classis, and such work as may be carried on in urban localities by classis or classical missionary. It is reasonable to infer that the provision, originating as it did and placed in the constitution where it is, meant only dispensation related to the admitting of some one to the ordained ministry as does section 110. It is not so said; it might relate to concerns in the administration of the missionary work other than the licensing or ordaining of a person who is to be missionary worker. When it is said "from the full requirements," it is hardly to be understood that it means all the requirements, but rather from some requirements, the entire body of requirements not being fully or completely insisted upon. It will be noted

that the dispensation is to be granted only when it "shall be impracticable for the classis to comply with such requirements." This suggests that the dispensation is granted to the classis rather than to a student or candidate. Just what are the requirements in mind, just what the situations the provision is meant to meet, is not altogether clear.

112. The General Synod shall be the legal custodian of the funds, devises, bequests and other property which shall be given, devised, or bequeathed directly to the General Synod of the Reformed Church in America or to or for the use of its various unincorporated funds. This custody shall be exercised on behalf of the General Synod by its trustees who shall be known as the Board of Direction of the Corporation to be constituted as hereinafter provided. The income or interest from such funds shall be administered either by said Board or by such administrative agencies as the General Synod shall from time to time direct. Nothing in this section, however, shall be construed as precluding the other incorporated boards and agencies of the church from the receipt, custody or administration under general supervision of the General Synod, of any funds, devises, bequests and other property which shall have been given, devised, or bequeathed directly to them.

113. The Board of Direction of the Corporation of General Synod shall consist of six persons elected by the General Synod in accordance with its Articles of Incorporation. These members of the Board of Direction shall be elected at the stated meeting of the General Synod and shall serve for three years; they shall be divided into three classes of two members each, and the term of two members shall expire at each stated meeting of the General Synod.

The General Synod at its stated meeting shall elect one of the members of the Board of Direction to be its President for one year.

The Board of Direction as soon as it has been constituted by the General Synod shall elect a Treasurer of the General Synod and of the Board to serve for one year. Such Treasurer need not be a member of the Board of Direction, and unless previously elected thereto by General Synod, he shall have no vote therein. He shall execute and give a bond approved by the Board for the faithful and satisfactory performance of his duties, and at its expense.

The by-laws of the Board of Direction must be approved by the General Synod and may be amended only by the latter and at its stated meeting.

The Board of Direction shall report to the General Synod at its stated meeting a full statement of the funds, receipts and ex-



penditures during its fiscal year. The fiscal year shall be from May 1 to the following April 30.

The General Synod is the denomination incorporated. It was incorporated in the State of New York as "The General Synod of the Reformed Protestant Dutch Church"; it is now "The General Synod of the Reformed Church in America." As a corporation it is legal custodian of property and funds. When question arose, there was act passed by the State of New Jersey in 1825, authorizing it to hold property in that state. In 1863 similar act was passed by the State of Michigan. The property and funds may be held or administered for its own immediate conduct and activity. They may be held and administered, principal invested and income distributed, for agencies, institutions, and boards created by it and for whose benefit and use the property or funds may have come into possession of the General Synod. These institutions, boards, or funds may be themselves incorporated, as already said, and be qualified thus to hold such property and funds as may come directly to them. The separate but associated incorporation has some advantages, especially the more direct appeal through the incorporated title to possible donor of gift or bequest.

The Board of Direction of the Corporation is the constituted board of trustees of the corporation, the immediate administrators of the funds which it holds. Its members are appointed by the General Synod according to system created by it; and the president of the board, one of the members already appointed, is elected by the General Synod. The treasurer is elected by the board itself; he need not be a member of the board. The terms of office, the necessity of the treasurer's bond, and the requiring of full report annually are stated. The fiscal year of the Board of Direction, of the denomination, is May 1 to April 30.

114. The General Synod shall have power to maintain and regulate a friendly correspondence with the highest judicatory or assembly of another religious denomination for the purpose of promoting co-operation in all matters relating to the extension of the Kingdom of God.

Correspondence with other church bodies, active fraternal relation with them, has always been characteristic of the church; it is traditional. At the Synod of Dort, 1619, there was a remarkable assembly of the Reformed. There were present representatives from virtually every land where the Reformed faith had established itself; they shared in the adopting of the Canons of the Synod of Dort. In America the attitude of the church toward the other denominations early here was gracious and sometimes intimate; the Reformed Church from Holland and the Reformed Church from Germany were under the one Dutch authority and the ministers were active in either field. For a century and more the sending of delegates to one body and another with Christian greetings and cooperations has been a substantial custom. Articles of correspondence between the Presbyterian and Reformed Churches were adopted in 1822. The church has been readily associated in inter-church organizations, in federations, and in common agencies of service. It will be noted that the privilege of correspondence, by document or by delegates, is with the highest judicatory or assembly of other denominations. The purpose is sympathy and co-operation in the interest of the Kingdom.

115. A special meeting of the General Synod shall be called by the President on joint application of twelve ministers and twelve elders, at such place as may be determined by the president, vice-president and stated clerk of the General Synod. Three weeks' notice of such meeting shall be given to the members of Synod; this notice shall state the particular business for which it is called.

A special session of the General Synod is rarely called, has not been called in many years. It was held occasionally in past years when the church was more compact, the synod much smaller, for the election of a theological professor. An adjourned session is not mentioned by the constitution. Without the specifying, the right indisputably exists of annual session adjourning to a fixed time and place, of effecting thus a continuance of the regular annual session. (Digest: Adjourned Session.)

## ARTICLE X

### OF CUSTOMS AND USAGES

120. The order of worship on the Lord's Day shall be in accordance with the Liturgy of the Reformed Church in America. This order may be modified to include the Apostles' Creed or such other additions as may be directed by the Consistory for edification and profit.

In the constitution as revised in 1874 an order of worship in its simplest form was verbally recited at this point: invocation, salutation, the Commandments or other Scripture, singing, prayer, singing, sermon, prayer, collection, singing, benediction. The word as to it was "it is recommended that the following order be observed by all the churches." In the present provision of the constitution the order is not recited. The requirement is more positive: "the order of worship on the Lord's Day shall be in accordance with the liturgy." The order in the liturgy, then, is to be examined and respected; and the required minimum appears to be about what was formerly recited. The question may arise whether the words, "in accordance with," mean an exact detailed fulfillment or an avoiding of anything that is not consistent or harmonious. It is plain that the purpose of the law is to surely preserve in the service certain chief items of worship and at the same time to give generous latitude to the desire and judgment of an individual church, its minister, consistory, and congregation. This is indeed expressly stated: the order "may be modified to include . . . additions as may be directed by the consistory for edification and profit." In other words there may be an enlarging but not a diminishing of a minimum substance of worship which commends itself to universal use through its simplicity, dignity, and brevity. It is to be assumed that

virtually every church will wish, at one service or at both services, to expand and enrich the required order of worship. This will be usually through the adding of music, anthems and responses by the choir. Morning service and afternoon or evening service were specified in the past time words of the constitution; the present words simply refer to the orders in the liturgy as to be observed, one for the morning, one for the evening. When these orders are examined, it is observed at once that quite as much is simply recommended as is required. There is the invocation, but the use of the Lord's Prayer is recommended; there is the salutation; there is the Scripture, and this will "usually" consist of law, psalter, and other lesson from Old Testament or New Testament or both; responses "may be sung"; there shall be hymn, and prayer, and hymn; offering will be "commonly presented" before the sermon, but "may be" after the sermon, and there "may be" a prayer of dedication; there is the sermon, the hymn, the benediction. The evening service proposed is not very different; the law is not suggested and the Apostles' Creed is suggested. In a word there is an excellent norm of worship required; there is a larger order, also excellent, offered and recommended and usually very desirable for the uniform practice of the church; and there is generous privilege given of enlarging and enriching the order "in accordance with the liturgy" and "for edification and profit." The consistory are in authority. The minister usually has his own ideas and will be able to carry them out. He will wisely give due regard to local usages and preferences.

121. The Sacrament of Baptism shall be administered if possible at a time and place of public worship. The office for the Administration of the Sacrament must be read.

Churches generally have a set time for the sacrament of baptism, usually associated with the communion season. It may be administered at any service, however, and it might be well to confine it less to the ordinary set times. While it is to be administered at the place of public worship and at the time of public worship if possible, the words, if possible,

declare the lawfulness of the administration at other place and other time under some circumstances. The words leave the situation somewhat vague. Whether it is possible or not is apparently left to the minister, together with the adult candidate for baptism or the parents of the child to be baptized. Different ministers and different members of the church would have quite different judgment as to whether the church building and church time must be used in any given instance. Rarely would this be impossible in strictest sense for the baptizing of either adult or child. Illness, far distance, inclement weather, immediate urgency, and other reasons may appear to justify different place and time than those primarily required. A neighborhood chapel or school-house where service is held meets, at the time of its service, the primary requirements without question; and a baptism in such circumstance is often most impressive and edifying. "Time of service" hardly means just after service when the general congregation has retired but that hour seems sometimes justified. If not at church or chapel or neighborhood meeting house, the place proposed may be the parsonage, but quite invariably would be the home of the adult or child to be baptized. If, then, at the home in circumstance which seems to justify this, it is preferable that at least a little group be assembled; some neighbors may be there; the family group itself may be a large one. An elder at least is to be with the minister; while this is required, it will be remembered that the validity of the baptism is not impaired if no elder is present—as it is not impaired by any other incidental irregularity. The form must be read whether the baptism be at public worship or in private but, again, the validity of the baptism does not depend upon its use.

Many questions of detail and of expediency arise in connection with the administration. A minister may be in doubt whether the insistent unwillingness of parents wishing their child to be baptized to bring the child to church creates an impossibility justifying baptism at the home. It may be that it would indicate so perverse a spirit, such aloofness from the church, that a minister would feel compelled to decline



to officiate. This would hardly ever occur, it is quite sure. It will be considered right and for the spiritual welfare involved by almost every minister no doubt to baptize at the home if the Christian parents sincerely desire it and cannot be persuaded to have the ceremony in the church.

Who are privileged to bring their children? Parents both of whom are members of the church. A father or a mother who is a member of the church; and the two parents may stand together in the ceremony. Widely it is held that the parents, or a parent, baptized but not in full communion may bring a child. Parents not full members or even baptized—shall they be allowed baptism for their child especially in some crisis or distress when they sincerely and urgently ask it? The child may be dying and, not without some superstition perhaps but at least with anxious desire for the sign of salvation upon him, eager for comfort, the parents ask the sacrament. Probably most ministers would grant it. A genuine confession of faith would probably appear. Church membership might follow. Sponsors, godparents, witnesses, taking the vows with the parents, may be recognized at the sacrament of baptism and their names made part of the church record in connection with it. In the Rules of Dort, 1619, and in the articles, 1792, it is expressly noted that there may be or may not be such participants. Later the constitution makes no mention of them. Baptism is not to be repeated. Surely not, if it has been regularly administered by the minister of any Protestant Church. The same attitude properly maintains in connection with a baptism administered in the Roman Catholic Church. This question came before the General Synod in 1835 (403) and the synod by resolution referred it to the decision of any consistory before whom the question, the concrete case, might come. In case of a sensitive conscience and insistent personal request there might be a repeating. In many of these questions it is the consistory, or rather the elders, who have the determining authority. But practically in most instances no doubt it is the minister who must make the de-

cision, whose judgment determines the action appropriate to the office he fulfills.

The method of baptism in the church is quite universally by sprinkling, three times or only once. It is held that this is consistent with if not an exact following of New Testament practice. It is not held that this method or any one method is essential in the proper administering of the sacrament. The method of immersion is held to be perfectly valid and any minister is entirely within the bounds of propriety who finds it in any place or at any time desirable to administer baptism in this way.

122. The Sacrament of the Lord's Supper shall be administered if possible at least once every three months in every church. The office for the Administration of the Sacrament must be read.

The common custom among the churches is to have the Lord's Supper once in three months. In isolated churches, especially when without installed minister, it may in some years be less frequent. Some churches desire to have it and do have it more often, once in two months or even once a month. In many churches it is observed on special occasions or days, for example at Easter. There are considerations arguing the wisdom of quite long interval between the observances and there are considerations arguing wisdom of the short interval. The meaning and the spiritual service of the sacrament seem to suggest the more frequent observance. But the infrequency rather enhances its value and the contribution to spiritual life when it is observed. In most churches it is a not too often repeated rally day when the church members feel it a special duty and privilege to be in the church, to be at the Lord's Supper. In some churches the reverse is true; the sacrament is occasion for many members to stay away rather than be present; this is perhaps traceable to the emphasis of the liturgy, greater in the past in its words than used, upon the unworthy as unwelcome at the table. The form must always be read whether the administration is in public or in private; the abridged form, as in the case of baptism, is for some reasons the preferable one; it is the one generally used.

Various questions arise as to the administration, questions which the consistory or the elders answer in their discretion and according to their desire, the minister no doubt having the chief voice in deciding. There is no requirement that the deacons pass the elements. There is no requirement that unleavened bread be used or that leavened bread be used. There is no requirement that fermented wine be used or that unfermented wine be used. There is no requirement that one cup be used or that individual cups be used. Quite universally now unfermented wine and the individual cups are used. There is no requirement that the communicants stand or kneel or sit—sit in the pews as usual, or assemble in specified pews, or sit at a specially set table as custom survives in a very few churches. The elders and the deacons usually take seats near the minister. The deacons usually pass the elements. The minister usually serves the elders first; the deacons then serve first the minister then the congregation; or the minister serves both elders and deacons before he and the congregation are served. Sometimes the invitation to those not members of the local church is given to “those who love the Lord Jesus Christ”; sometimes the words are added “and who have confessed His name,” or their faith in Him; and sometimes there are further added the words “and are in good standing in their respective churches.” Sometimes a sermon is preached; sometimes there is, instead, an address at the table after the serving of the elements; sometimes there are both sermon and address.

The Preparatory Service is quite inseparably associated with the Lord’s Supper in the usage of the church. It is held in church or chapel at such time as in the judgment of the consistory best serves the convenience of the congregation and the promise of the sacrament.

123. The Sacraments may be administered in private in cases of sickness or other emergency, at least one elder being present with the minister.

The Lord’s Supper is here associated with baptism in the question of private administration. Here is the mention of the needed presence of an elder with the minister. Here the

words are used, "in cases of sickness or other emergency." The word, emergency, is perhaps broader, may seem to suggest more liberty, than the words, public if possible, in section 121. Sickness, infirmity, old age, frequently become occasion for the private administration of the Lord's Supper. As with baptism, a group of neighbors with the family group often adds much to the interest and profit of the communion. A neighborhood communion service is often a very happy and appropriate occasion. Sometimes someone who is dying wishes the communion, perhaps someone who has never sat at the table, who wishes to confess his faith and receive the bread and wine for the first time and perhaps for the last time. It will be one of the minister's greatest privileges to give him this ministry of life and comfort.

124. A catechism, or formal statement of doctrine to be used in teaching the young, must be first approved by the General Synod.

In past years more than now the catechism question would arise. The church has its own catechism, the Heidelberg with its Compendium. Its use in catechetical classes or in Sunday-school groups of the young people ought to be customary in every church. It is not to be assumed that they cannot be used with profit in classes of children. There are other catechisms not substantially different in their teaching, and preference has occasionally been for one or another here or there. The Westminster Catechism, admirable as it is, has been sometimes especially desired and has been used. The General Synod has approved it for use in the schools of the Reformed Church. A catechism for very small children, Brown's Catechism, was much in use years ago. The requirement is that no catechism or formal text-book of doctrine shall be used save such as is approved by the General Synod. It is to be emphasized that the Heidelberg Catechism is a text-book surpassed by none and admirably fitted for the instruction of both young people and children if dealt with intelligently and devotionally and with aptness to teach. To this should be added the word that the value of a definite book of definite teaching like the catechism can

hardly be over-stated, that the loss to the children if not used will be positive and far-reaching. Together with direct Bible teaching, with any other lines of needed instruction and influence, the catechism should have its place. The constitution strongly stresses this by its frequent reference to it.

125. Hymns to be used in public worship must be first approved by the General Synod.

Hymn-books have been prepared by the church itself or for it from time to time. They have been and they are excellent. The more recent publications regarded as its own, or its own associated with other church, are no doubt as satisfactory as any prepared under other auspices. The churches are not limited to their use, however. Other books if desired may be used, but only after their approval by the General Synod. Such approval has been given occasionally when request has been made. The word here is hymns: it is hymns assembled in book form that are naturally most meant. Individual hymns would scarcely come before the synod. It is true no doubt that churches here and there have used and do use hymn-books not the church's own and not formally approved by the synod. Considerable liberty has been exercised without sense of unlawfulness and without rebuke. Utmost discretion, however, should insure obedience to the spirit and intent of the requirement.



## ARTICLE XI

### OF DISCIPLINE AND OFFENCES

SECTION 130. Discipline is the exercise of the authority which the Lord Jesus Christ has given to His Church to promote its purity, to benefit the offender and to vindicate His own honor.

Discipline with its occasions and processes and judgments is the substance of virtually all the remaining provisions of the constitution, sections 130-170. While of necessity it has such extended and detailed treatment, the place of it in the actual experience and procedure of the church is, it is well realized, a very minor one. It is quite the least of the organized activities of the church. Occasions for its exercise are possibly few; certainly its exercise is infrequent: but the organized church cannot be without it, or without very exact and adequate provisions for its exercise. It represents, it is said, the authority given by the Lord Jesus Christ. That Jesus Christ has authority over His members and that His church as a society must recognize some responsibility for it given by Him is not questioned. Authority as ordinarily understood, however, has greatly declined both in practice and in theory in the Protestant Church. The Roman Church supremely exalts itself as the agent of divine authority and this is largely the secret of its strength as an institution.

Three objectives in the exercise of discipline are here set forth. The purity of the church is its choicest possession and in its human degree is to be maintained and promoted. The honor of Christ as the great Head of the church is much in the church's keeping and should in so far be kept inviolate. The offender who mars the purity of the church and who brings dishonor upon his Lord deserves such official

attention as will benefit him as well as represent the church's ideal of purity and its exalting of the honor of Christ. It is plain that discipline must not be over-active, that it cannot formally concern itself with all deviations from loftiest character and conduct, that influences other than discipline may often be the better and surer avenues toward the great objective. Sometimes when zeal for the church's purity and for Christ's honor urges act of discipline, it is plain that such act will quite surely not benefit the offender and will really be a disservice to others and to the general church good. In the atmosphere and habit of the present time, the benefit to the offender in act of discipline, severe discipline at least, has to be recognized as a doubtful issue. A refraining from discipline sometimes when obligation to exercise it is in question is likely to justify itself by Jesus' words as to the leaving of the tares with the wheat until the harvest. Nevertheless it must be said, surely without contradiction, that discipline is too much neglected in the Protestant Church, that it should more often definitely exercise the authority committed to it for the purity of the church and the honor of its Head—hoping as well for benefit to the offender.

In the exercise of discipline there needs to be courage but at the same time discretion and broad Christian charity. In all formal procedure it is imperative that strictest attention be given to every technicality, to the exact words of all related requirements of the constitution. In cases especially serious or related to the higher judicatories it is quite surely wise to consult with someone especially familiar with these requirements, with the lines of their application and with any precedents which may be in some measure a guide. In matters of major importance, of delicate or difficult aspects, of possible contact with civil law, it may be of utmost importance to consult with a lawyer in order that conformity with civil law and even adequate understanding of the church law may be made sure.

131. All members of the Church including all who have been baptized therein are under the care of the church and subject to its government and discipline, administered by the elders together

with the minister, if there be one. Ministers and Consistories as such are under the care of the Classis and subject to its government and discipline. Professors of Theology are under the care of the General Synod and subject to its government and discipline.

That the church's prerogative of discipline has in its field, beside communicant members, those also who have only been baptized is true in principle though hardly at all expressed in practice. The child baptized is essentially regarded as a member of the church; coming into full communion is the entrance upon the larger privilege of church membership reserved for those mature enough to sufficiently understand it and profit by it. To regard one who, grown to maturity, definitely turns from the church, persistently refuses to claim the communion privilege, as continuing always a member by reason of infant baptism seems not wholly tenable. The phrase is sometimes used that, grown to manhood or womanhood, a baptized member not coming to the Lord's Supper simply refuses to stay in the church rather than refuses to join it. On the other hand there are many, there were more in past generations, perhaps, who have not seen their way clear to come to the Lord's Supper yet are finely attentive to the services of the church, to its practical work, perhaps even to the personal religious life, and are glad to be counted as in some way or degree at least members of the church. In our own church order rarely if ever is an only baptized member placed under discipline; very generally he is not thought of as a member at all. The reminder given by the constitution is that more immediate and constant attention should be given by minister and elders and members in full communion to the only baptized members than is commonly given; that a special duty to them should be recognized, that they should not be thought of as wholly undifferentiated from those who have never received the seal of the covenant of God's grace. The General Synod has from time to time directed and repealed and directed again a column in the statistics of church reports, "baptized non-communicants"; it is an item difficult to determine but of real validity and importance.

Discipline in the local church being committed to the elders with the minister, they in turn and the consistory are subject to the discipline of the classis; it may be fully assumed then, agreeable to section 51, that the classis as such is subject to the discipline of the Particular Synod; and that the Particular Synod as such is subject to the discipline of the General Synod. Professors of theology as such are not subject to the discipline of either elders or classis but of the General Synod only.

132. The exercise by a church judicatory of the authority to discipline officers or private members for public or private offences may take the form of an admonition by such judicatory, or of suspension from church membership, or from office, or of deposition from office, or of excommunication, or of more than one of these, as the gravity of the offence in the opinion of the judicatory may warrant. Acts of admonition or suspension may be private or public at the discretion of the judicatory.

Admonition is the formal word for the most moderate act of discipline by a judicatory. Elsewhere in the constitution the word, censure, and the word, rebuke, are used with, it would appear, the same significance intended. "Censure" may occur somewhere, however, in its oldtime sense of discipline, any penalty. As an act of discipline an admonition is, of course, the formal official action of the body vested with the right of discipline; a personal word of the minister or of an elder however admonitory it may be is not an admonition in the meaning of the constitution. The question may arise whether admonition is of continuous force or whether as an act of discipline it ends with its voicing; whether the discipline is the giving of a specific word only or the placing under a continuous condemnation; whether if one thus disciplined wishes to be dismissed to another church he may receive a letter as "in good and regular standing." Each interpretation has somewhat to support it. The weight would seem in favor of understanding the act as at once technically concluded. The procedure of lifting or revoking an admonition is probably not known in the church procedure; without a lifting or revoking the end of a continuing state of admonition would be wrongly indetermi-

nate. The word in its ordinary occurrences carries no aspect of continuance. In the case of a letter of dismissal, however, it is entirely proper that the dismissing body should make known to the body addressed the fact of recent admonition if fairness to the body addressed seems to require it.

Suspension from church membership is fairly interpreted as meaning just what it says, a suspending or intermitting of membership itself in the church. The usual enacting and usual understanding of it is, however, a suspension from the Lord's Supper, a presumably temporary excluding from that privilege. Excommunication is the complete ending of church membership, the presumably permanent excluding from the organized church society. So, suspension from office is the intermitting of service in the office, and deposition is the complete severing from the office. An officer of the church might perhaps be deposed from office without his church membership being involved; an officer could hardly be suspended from church membership without being also at least suspended from his office. A public act of discipline contrasted with a private act means usually announcement from the pulpit that the action has been taken; or it might be in the case of admonition the act itself in the presence of the church.

133. Nothing shall be admitted as a matter of accusation or considered an offence which cannot be shown to be such from the Holy Scriptures or from the Constitution of the Church, or is not such a sin or offence as to make the perpetrator infamous before the world. Such are, for example: blasphemy, assault or acts of violence, adultery, fornication, perjury, lying, slander, theft, forgery, violation of vows, desertion of office, intrusion on the office of another, scandalous traffic, schism, simony, and drunkenness.

Caution is enjoined as to the official admitting of accusations and as to the official recognizing of offences. Individual judgments and group judgments differ. Men readily set up standards in practical and current matters perfectly obvious to them which other men do not regard as necessary standards or tests of Christian character or conduct. Some things regarded at some periods and places as unlawful from the Christian viewpoint are at other periods and places



regarded as lawful. Even what may be generally regarded as injurious to church life and spirit may be at the same time approved by an individual conscience and be clearly within the field of proper personal freedom. The constitution then proposes three tests of what is right matter of accusation, what is rightly to be considered at the official viewpoint an offence. It must be shown such by the Scriptures or by the constitution of the church or by its own infamy before the world. The constitution would seem to be in point only on occasion of disobedience to its requirements, breaking of pledges taken under its provisions, schism, contumacy: and yet as to the minister it is very broad—he shall “by word and example promote always the spiritual welfare of his people.” Infamy before the world is a test by which every common crime or immorality is condemned. The Holy Scriptures may condemn some things of which the church’s constitution does not speak and which the world does not count infamous. In emphatically setting forth this test the constitution does not by any means relieve the situation of all uncertainty and disagreement. The variations of judgment and conscience that as above always assert themselves find a most common field of difference in the application of the Scriptures themselves, their meaning, what they require and what they forbid. The list of offences here expressly given is only, as plainly said, for example. It is by no means an all-inclusive list. There are many other ill conducts distinctly alien to the life of church members. The stress here upon the more gross offences of ordinary life carries, perhaps, its warning that minor faults are not to be unduly magnified into offences calling for official action.

134. Offences for which discipline is to be administered are private or public. Private offences are those which are known to an individual only, or at most to a very few; public offences are those which are notorious and scandalous.

135. Private offences shall not be presented at once to the church judicatory but the offender shall be dealt with according to the mode pointed out by our Lord Jesus Christ in Matt. xviii:15-17. The same course shall be pursued in cases of personal

or private injuries. If these methods are unavailing, the matter shall be presented to the judicatory to which the offender is amenable.

136. Persons who present charges without having taken the steps prescribed by our Lord Jesus Christ shall be considered guilty of an offence against the peace and order of the church and shall be censured accordingly.

A private offence in the meaning of the constitution is not an offence against the one or the few by whom it is quite exclusively known. A private or personal injury is an offence against the party himself who is considering its relation to the church. The requirement is plain, the same in both cases, that the one who knows an offence or the one who has suffered an offence deserving the church's attention shall first follow the procedure appointed in Matthew 18:15-17, a personal talk with the offender; then if need be a talk in the presence of witnesses. After that if the offence still remain there shall be a presenting of it to the judicatory. So serious in the view of the constitution is a failure to follow this course that one who presents charges without the preceding private effort to cure the wrong is himself considered guilty of an offence. He is to be censured, it is said, this word being used no doubt, as before remarked, as equivalent to the formal word in discipline, admonition, although it might in its meaning include the more grave penalties.

137. The proper judicatory shall take immediate cognizance of a charge by general rumor. In this case the previous steps prescribed by our Lord Jesus Christ as to private offences are not necessary.

138. The charge by general rumor must meet the following requirements:

1. It must specify definitely a particular sin or sins.
2. It must have obtained general circulation.
3. It must be persistent.
4. It must be accompanied with strong presumption of its truth.

The charge by general rumor relates apparently to the second class of offences recited in section 134, public offences, those which are notorious and scandalous. There is no waiting for the word of some person who alone or with a few others knows the matter. Word is general about it

and the judicatory gives it its attention. The procedure enjoined in connection with private offences is not necessary. It may, however, be both wise and effectual. A private talk by a member or members of the judicatory with the party concerned may clear up as happily as possible the publicly discussed situation or may at least lead most discreetly to its best possible correction. Four aspects of a general rumor required to give it substance and validity are very concretely stated to guard against too great or too immediate credence for a known rumor. A rumor rises easily, grows easily—sometimes quite unworthy of attention. It must be specific and it must be persistent as well as of general circulation; and it must carry at least strong presumption of truth.

139. A person who has been convicted of a crime by due process of law in a civil court shall be suspended by the judicatory to which he is amenable from the privilege of membership in the church and from any ecclesiastical office with which he may be invested, until he shall have established his innocence or manifested his repentance to such judicatory.

Action as here defined is mandatory. The person shall be suspended. The action must be formally and specifically taken, the provision differing at this point from the provision formerly in the constitution. It was in past time provided that a person thus convicted in a civil court was *ipso facto* suspended from the church membership and office; no official procedure by the judicatory itself was needed. The suspension shall maintain until innocence is established or repentance shown. It is not stated before whom or in whose judgment innocence must be established. Naturally one might say the court in which the conviction was or a higher court reviewing the case. That the church could recognize only such establishing of innocence is not to be affirmed. Innocence might be established in the judgment of the elders, the civil court not recognizing or recording it; and thus there might be an ending by the elders and minister of the suspension. Or even at the very time of conviction in a civil court the church judicatory may be fully convinced of the innocence of the convicted person. It is fair to as-

sume that in such instance the judicatory would be carrying out the spirit and intent of the constitution in refraining from any act of suspension, leaving the member in possession of all his church privileges. Beyond this, there might be immediate formal action of the judicatory declaring that in its judgment the innocence of the party is established.

In virtually all cases, however, the convicting of a crime in a civil court means guilt; it justifies and compels the immediate act of suspension by the church judicatory; and the suspension ends only at the manifesting of genuine repentance by the convicted and suspended party; such repentance and the consequent restoration might be at any time during the period of civil or criminal penalty or at any time after its concluding.

140. A person who persistently rejects admonitions of the Consistory may be suspended from the privileges of membership in the church. Should such person, having been repeatedly admonished and then suspended, fail to show marks of repentance, the Consistory, with the permission of Classis, may proceed to excommunicate him.

141. The Consistory shall publicly notify the congregation of its intention before it proceeds to the excommunication of a member by declaring his offence, the care and attention bestowed upon him by admonition and suspension, and his unrepentant attitude in spite of all these labors. This procedure shall comprise three steps. The name of the offender shall not be mentioned in the first instance, that he may in some measure be spared. The name shall be mentioned in the second instance, the consent of Classis for excommunication having been first obtained. In the third instance, the congregation shall be informed that unless the offender repents he will be excluded from the communion of the church. The interval between these notifications shall be at the discretion of the Consistory.

142. The elders shall have jurisdiction in the case of a charge against an elder or deacon. If convicted he may be suspended from his office or from the privileges of membership in the church, or from both.

The use here of the word, admonitions, sustains the understanding of this discipline as an act completed with its voicing, not continuous. The use of the plural indicates a repeating of such discipline, not as if a prior act were still in force. The use here of the word, consistory, is ap-

parently a misuse, another of the instances of the lingering of the old use of the word when elders only were members of it; it is the elders with the minister, not the consistory, who are the officers in whom the power of discipline, of official admonition, is vested; section 40 is perfectly clear and decisive. The passing on to the next act of discipline, suspension, after a persistent rejecting of admonitions by an offender is at the option of the elders; he may be suspended; it is not said that he must be suspended; in the elders' judgment the penalty may have gone far enough, the good of church and offender more likely be served by refraining from suspension than by enacting it. The excommunication which may follow when suspension, added to admonitions, has failed to restore the offender cannot proceed without the permission of the classis. The elders, the word, consistory, here again wrongly used, may prefer the request to the classis and if the request be granted are the officers to excommunicate by formal procedure.

The act of excommunication is virtually unknown in the actual procedure of the church. Suspension, itself only too rarely exercised, is quite universally regarded as the sufficiently extreme discipline. An offender, however extreme, is quite universally left in the status of a suspended member. It would be salutary perhaps if discipline were occasionally advanced to excommunication. If the procedure is undertaken, so extreme and so solemn is it, a series of steps is carefully required, a threefold notifying of the congregation. The details of these announcements are clearly stated and need no comment. The consent of the classis appears as if between the first and second steps required. It might unquestionably, however, be asked and secured before the first step is taken. The intimation seems to be that the first step might bring the offender after all to repentance and the further process of excommunication, consent for it, be unnecessary. The possibility, the hope, of repentance is indulged even between the second and third steps of the process. The intervals between the required notifications are in the dis-



cretion of the elders as wisest attitude toward both offender and church may dictate.

The elders' power of discipline is not only over a member of the church as such but also over an elder and a deacon as such. The acts of discipline in such instance are here repeated which were clearly stated in section 132.

143. The Consistory shall have the right to close the pulpit against a minister of the Word who has been charged with any public sin or gross offence which would render his appearance in the pulpit inexpedient or offensive. Proceedings of the Consistory in such cases are at its peril, but are taken in order to prevent scandal, and are not to be considered as a trial. The case must be promptly submitted to the Classis.

144. A minister shall be suspended from his office by the Classis to which he belongs when he shall have been duly convicted of any offence which affects the purity of his personal or ministerial character; and his pastoral connection with the congregation in which he was settled shall be dissolved *ipso facto* if the conviction and suspense shall be sustained on a final appeal.

145. Any person who has been suspended from membership may be restored to full communion on profession of penitence and on renewal of his vows of membership before the ecclesiastical judicatory to which he is amenable. Any person who has been excommunicated and who becoming penitent desires to be re-instated in his former relation to the church may be re-admitted on tendering a profession of his repentance and after due public notice to the congregation, either before the administration of the Lord's Supper, or at some other seasonable opportunity.

The same rule shall apply in the case of an officer who has been suspended from office, and in the case of a minister who has been suspended or deposed from office.

The consistory, not the elders, are unquestionably intended in this provision. The procedure referred to as proper on their part is not an act of discipline; it is an act of church management, official control, trustees' control. They have a right to close the pulpit against a minister, their own installed minister as well as a minister not their pastor. The closing of it against their own minister would naturally be only in extreme circumstance, for very grave reason and with great care. The reason broadly speaking would be that he was charged with public or gross offence, that therefore his appearing in the pulpit would be unseemly and hurtful to the church. It is an executive act, not a judicial act; it

is not a trial or a conviction. The act, it is warned, is at the consistory's peril, that is to say it faces more than the possibility of open resistance, a possible adverse review by higher judicatory or even by civil authority. The pastor by the terms of his call which is a contract has the apparent right to appear in the pulpit, to carry on the preaching service agreed upon. While this right is conditioned by the terms of this section of the constitution and of other sections, nevertheless utmost discretion is necessary to avoid extra trouble and offence and to avoid any technical unlawfulness. In general it is to be assumed that a civil court would sustain action of a consistory taken under this provision of the church's constitution, taken with due regard to all its provisions and in entire conformity with all ordinary civil or community law, even though the minister were later proved to be the innocent not guilty occasion. Even when sure of legal propriety, ecclesiastical and civil, a consistory would additionally wish to avoid possible violence at the church, at its pulpit or at its door. The closing of the pulpit to the minister might mean the closing for the time of the church to all services. Naturally, for whatever reason, the action is rarely taken. If the minister in question does not accede to definite desire or request expressed to him that he cease officiating, the usual course would be not to forcibly prevent it but, enduring it and taking the case promptly as is required to the classis, await its procedure in the case and its decision. With the classis rests the responsibility of trial and the privilege of ending at any moment the pastoral relation, thus separating the minister from the church.

It is imperative that a minister be suspended from his office by the classis when, tried for offence, he has been found guilty. The suspension is from his good ministerial standing, from the exercise of the functions of the ministry. It is an entirely different matter from the severing of his relation with a local church; this relation is dissolved *ipso facto* upon the sustaining of the conviction and suspension on final appeal, is dissolved without formal act although

the dissolving must be recognized and recorded in the minutes of the classis. This delay of the severing of pastoral relation until a final appeal would not attach with every case. The case might not be appealed at all. Moreover, the classis might have exercised much earlier its inalienable right of severing the relation by formal action, not waiting for the *ipso facto* of the perhaps far on day of action by highest judicatory.

The restoring to full communion of a member who has been suspended from membership or from the privileges of it must be the constant desire of the church; and no possibility of a proper restoring should ever be overlooked; but it is made plain that such action is not to be a casual or informal thing, that it must be only after a profession of penitence and a renewal of vows—and this not in private or to the minister alone but before the elders. The same is said of one excommunicated, the procedure in this case including public notice to the congregation, appropriately perhaps just before an observing of the Lord's Supper. The same procedure maintains in the restoring of an officer to the functions of his office, of a minister to the functions of his office.

146. The Classis shall have jurisdiction in the case of a Consistory accused of unfaithfulness to duty or of disobedience to Classis or to the Constitution or to any laws and regulations of the Church. Members of such a Consistory, if convicted after due process and trial, may be censured or deposed from office, and in the latter case shall be disqualified for re-election until Classis shall remove the disqualification. The Classis shall fulfill the duties of a Consistory when all its members shall be so removed until a new Consistory shall be legally constituted.

The consistory as a body, as well as an individual member of it, is subject to discipline. The classis is the responsible judicatory. The grounds for discipline may be various, broadly stated as unfaithfulness to duty or disobedience to classis, to the constitution, or to any laws and rules of the church. There may be a neglecting of the ordinary and necessary details of proper church maintenance and government, neglect as to services or activities or finances

or properties. It is unquestionably true that great detriment often comes to a church through the plain failure of its consistory to give heed to pressing situations, to take up vital problems, to give leadership and good support. It is unquestionably true that a classis is often grievously at fault in not addressing itself to such a consistory, not necessarily in the way of discipline but at least in the way of suggestion and even imperative advice. Such action would have saved the life of churches not a few and would have meant larger life to not a few of but feeble existence. The classis may, along lines of its proper authority, direct a consistory to pursue a certain course of action and, its direction not heeded, then proceed to discipline. Care must be exercised that there be no trespassing beyond its province in the way of mandatory legislation. Instances have not been unknown in recent years of a consistory pursuing some course contrary to the constitution, ignorantly perhaps, and then wilfully resisting the instruction and requirement of the classis directed to the correcting of an unlawful situation. A consistory as a whole, or the members of it, uniting in any one of the wrong conducts, may be tried in due process and, if convicted, be censured or deposed from office. The word, censure, is here again used as if it meant a formal discipline—if so, synonymous here with admonition. The reference here to this most moderate of the disciplines further sustains the understanding already set forth that the admonition is not a continuing disability, a continuous state of discipline; since, having received admonition, the officers remain in the full exercise of their office. If, however, the officers are deposed, they are not only out of office but under continuing disqualification for office; they cannot be re-elected until the disqualification is removed; this removal may be apparently by simply a formal act of classis. If the consistory has come into its position of unlawfulness or disobedience only by a majority vote, a minority having stood for lawful and obedient action, it is self-evident that the action of the classis would be against the majority members, ending perhaps in their

deposition from office. The remaining members would be a still legal consistory; and the filling of vacancies would be accomplished as soon as possible and expedient. If the whole consistory is deposed, the classis fulfills the duties of a consistory until, under the classis' arrangements, a new consistory is chosen and is in office.



## ARTICLE XII

### OF PROCESS AND TRIAL

SECTION 150. Offences may be brought for trial before the proper judicatory by individual accusation or by common fame. The process in the former case must be in the name of the accuser, or accusers, who must come forward openly to support the charge. In the latter case no person need be named as the accuser. The time, place and circumstances shall be specifically stated in writing in all charges.

151. Great caution is to be exercised in receiving an accusation where there is any reason to believe that it is preferred through passion or unchristian motive, or where the accuser is under censure or of doubtful reputation or has a prospect of temporal advantage.

152. The rule prescribed in I Tim. v:19, which requires two or three witnesses shall always be observed in admitting accusation against a minister or an elder.

153. The testimony of more than one witness is required to establish an accusation against any member of the church. If two or more witnesses bear testimony each to different acts of the same general nature, this shall be considered sufficient to establish the accusation if not disproved.

The provisions with regard to process and trial are for the most part clear and definite; they need no repeating and little comment. The unvarying emphasis is on discretion and fairness. Technical regularity from the start is of utmost importance. When an individual brings accusation he must stand forth as indeed the accuser, not shifting responsibility to anyone else or initial responsibility to the judicatory. When common fame is the accuser initial responsibility does lie with the judicatory. There is to be no vagueness at all about the charge when it really reaches the stage of being a charge; time, place, and circumstance must be specified and in writing. If an individual brings an accusation, it does not necessarily have to be received, given

a formal standing and a judicial treatment; it is for the judicatory to judge whether it deserves the asked-for formal procedure; any one of several things may cast doubt at once on the validity of the charge; passion, revenge, envy, desire for personal preferment or advantage; the accuser himself may not be of good standing in the church or in the community.

It being the privilege of the judicatory to "admit" or not admit an accusation, a special caution or safeguard is required in the case of a minister or elder. This is natural in view of the dignity of the office and the added gravity attaching with such case. The way of Scripture is required: "Against an elder receive not an accusation but before two or three witnesses." Apparently, the meaning is only "in the presence of" such witnesses. Perhaps, however, a judicatory would not be wrong or unwise in attaching some importance to the attitude of such witnesses, whether they were or were not in sympathy with the charge preferred. Sustaining witnesses are the subject of the immediately following provision. More than one are required in the case of any member of the church, therefore in the case of minister or elder as well as ordinary member. These are necessary to establish an accusation. It will be noted that sections 151, 152, and 153 successively use the words, receive, admit, establish, all apparently with different meanings: receive, that is give any preliminary attention; admit, that is allow a technical, formal standing as a case; establish, that is prove. The fact that two witnesses do not testify as to one act of an offence but to different acts of the same offence does not make their testimony unacceptable as proof of the offence.

The question may arise whether an individual accusation before a church judicatory must come from a church member or may come from some one himself wholly outside of the church's jurisdiction. There appears to be no reason for regarding the judicatory as limited to receiving accusation from church member alone.

154. All citations for trial and citations for all such witnesses

as may be required on either side shall be issued and signed by the president and clerk of the judicatory.

155. Witnesses who are members of the church and who have been lawfully cited to appear and give testimony, and who refuse to obey the citation shall be amenable to church discipline.

156. A second citation shall be issued if the accused refuses to obey a first citation, and this shall always be accompanied by a notice, that if the accused still refuses to appear at the time and place appointed he will be liable to censure for contumacy and also that the judicatory will proceed to the trial and decision of his case as if he were present.

157. A copy of the accusation shall be furnished to the accused at the time when the citation is served. This citation shall designate the time when and the place where the accused shall put in his answer. Not less than ten days shall be allowed to intervene between the time when the citation is served and the time when the answer is to be received, and no shorter period shall be allowed between receiving the answer of the accused and the trial of the case, except with the consent of all the parties interested.

An accusation having been admitted, given standing as a cause for trial, all procedure thenceforth must be carried out with most careful formality. Time and place of trial are appointed by the judicatory. Written citations are necessary, citation of the accused to appear and stand trial, citation of each witness desired for the arraignment and each witness desired by the accused or any recognized defender of him. All of them are citations by the judicatory, signed by its president and clerk, and in due order served personally to make sure the receiving of them. Members of the church cited as witnesses and refusing to appear and give testimony become themselves liable to church discipline. Citations may be issued for desired witnesses who are not members of the church; such citations, of course, have no authority; anyone who fails to appear and testify, being under no jurisdiction of the church, cannot be in any way disciplined. It may be that a citation of one not a member of the church would be properly in the form of a request, not a direction. It is also perhaps to be understood that the judicatory has the right to hear witnesses who may appear and can give testimony who have been earlier unknown or who at least have not received formal citation.

The person accused receives, apparently, citation to two

occasions, witnesses being cited to but one. They are summoned to the time and place of trial to give their testimony in the formal trying of the case. The accused is cited, with a copy of the accusation given at the same time, to put in answer at a designated place and at a designated time different from, prior to, the time of trial and he is cited to appear at the time and place appointed for the trial. He must be allowed ten days between the serving of the citation and the necessary receiving of the answer; and at least ten days must be allowed between the receiving of the answer and the trial unless all parties consent to a less period of time. Greater period of time in each instance is often wise, a larger allowing for contingencies. If the accused ignores a first citation, he receives a second citation of the same sort naming place and new time with warning as to what will follow a failure to obey it. The judicatory was in session on the first date; the accused was absent; and the judicatory is now convened on the second date. For the second time the accused is absent and he may now be dealt with at once; without any delay or process of trial the judicatory may censure him for contumacy, that is, discipline him in some way for the disrespect shown it. This is not enough, however. The judicatory "will proceed to the trial and decision of his case as if he were present." It is thus required that the offence shall receive its own judgment, shall not be relieved from it by the absence of the offender or by the penalty which may have been imposed for contumacy.

158. No accusation shall be admitted unless brought forward by the accuser within the space of two years after the time of the alleged offence, except when it shall appear that unavoidable impediments have prevented an earlier bringing of the accusation.

159. Neither accuser nor accused shall act as a member of the judicatory in any stage of a trial before it nor sit in judgment on the case.

160. Witnesses shall always be examined in the presence of the accused and he shall be permitted to cross-examine them. The evidence shall be faithfully recorded and shall be subscribed by the witnesses and in its final form with the sentence or decision shall be entered upon the records. The parties interested shall be

allowed copies of the same. A commission of the judicatory may be appointed by it to take testimony at a distance, if this is demanded by either party. Due notice shall be given to all parties of the appointment and membership of this commission and of the time and place of its meeting.

161. Professional counsel shall not be permitted to appear and plead in cases of process in any of the ecclesiastical courts, but in the trial of any case before a Consistory a member of Classis may prepare and conduct the case on either side. In the higher courts the accused person if unable to present and plead his case to advantage, may request, and the president may appoint, any minister or elder belonging to the judicatory before which he appears, to prepare and conduct his case as he may judge proper. The minister or elder so appointed shall not be allowed to sit in judgment on the case, as a member of the judicatory.

It is not to be supposed that in any ordinary circumstance a valid accusation would delay two years for its presenting or that a matter two years past would deserve official attention in the absence of any more recent occurrence giving occasion for charge. There might be circumstance offering a different estimate of the delay and it is for the judicatory to determine and to admit the past-date accusation if in its judgment there has been unavoidable impediment to the earlier bringing of the charge. It is also but ordinary discretion and equity that neither accuser or accused have any judicial position in the case. If a member of the judicatory, his function as a member is suspended in all the body's judicial consideration of the case and in the rendering of verdict upon it. It is not stated whether or not witnesses are to be put under oath. The articles, 1792, recognize the propriety of an oath taken before a magistrate at the discretion of the judicatory; the constitution, 1833, expressly says, "after being sworn or solemnly affirmed"; in 1874 it uses the same words; in 1916 it omits all such reference; the question lies in the discretion of the judicatory. Fairness and desire for the truth dictate that the witnesses be examined in the presence of the accused and that he be permitted to examine them. There must be a true and full record; this must be signed by the witnesses; it must be in final form written in the minutes of the judicatory; and the decision must also be reported in the minutes. This care-



ful and complete record is for definiteness in action, for availableness on any occasion in all after time, and especially for use in instance of any appeal to higher judicatory. Each party concerned has right to a copy of the record. In the course of the trial, or perhaps antecedent to it, the appointing of a commission and the taking by it of testimony at a distance if either party demand is authorized; the fact of appointment, the names of those appointed, and the time and place of their meeting must be, prior to the time of meeting, made known to all parties concerned. The inference is that the parties, any one of them, may be present at such taking of testimony. The members of the commission are naturally perhaps, though not necessarily, members of the judicatory; authorized persons at the distant place might be used.

The excluding of professional counsel in the conduct of a case is plainly proper and wise. Their presence might very readily introduce an atmosphere and procedure hurtful to every person and every interest concerned; it is not in the nature of the case appropriate. It is perfectly possible, sometimes advisable perhaps, for a party concerned to confer privately with professional counsel in order to be more clearly aware of rights and privileges. Instead of professional counsel a member of classis may serve as counsel for either party in a case before consistory; the party may really need the advice and help of some one thus of larger knowledge and experience; and the one thus advising and helping may be a lawyer. Apparently in such instance the party may choose from the classis any adviser and helper he desires. In the higher courts, in like situation of an accused person unable adequately to deal with his case and desiring counsel, he may make request and the president may make appointment. The person appointed must be a minister or an elder, a lawyer perhaps, of the judicatory concerned. The accused then does not make his own appointment but he requests if he desires to do so a particular man and the president naturally will appoint him. Such counsel, therefore, will have the dignity of of-

ficial as well as personal assigning to the task. Such appointed person surrenders for this case his privilege of sharing as a member in the judicial functioning of the judicatory.

## ARTICLE XIII

### OF APPEALS AND COMPLAINTS

SECTION 162. The right of appeal belongs to either of the original parties in any case who considers himself to be aggrieved or injured by a decision of an ecclesiastical judicatory. The same right belongs also to a Consistory or to a Classis as an original party. The appeal must always be made to the next higher judicatory.

163. The Particular Synod shall be the final court of appeal for all cases which have originated in a Consistory, except when a member of the Particular Synod from each Classis belonging to it, except the Classis from whose action the appeal was taken, shall within ten days of its adjournment declare in writing to the president that the case adjudicated is a proper one for appeal to the General Synod. In such a case, the appeal if properly made shall be entertained by the General Synod.

164. The General Synod shall constitute by election or otherwise a permanent Committee on Judicial Business to which shall be referred by the stated clerk all appeals and complaints with all papers and documents pertaining thereto before the same are presented to the Synod.

165. The permanent Committee on Judicial Business shall consist of three ministers and two elders. They need not be members of the General Synod. The term of one member of this committee shall expire annually and his successor shall be chosen at the stated meeting of the General Synod to serve for five years. A vacancy in the committee arising from death, resignation or other cause shall be filled in the same manner for the unexpired term. The committee shall elect its own chairman.

Every member and every officer of the church, every consistory and every classis, every original party, accuser or accused, in a case before a judicatory has right of appeal from its decision. The act appealed from is not necessarily a judicial decision. The appeal must go to the next higher judicatory; it cannot go direct from consistory to Particular Synod or direct from classis to General Synod. If a case starting in consistory is appealed and reaches Particular Synod it stops there save in exceptional cases. A

case thus originating is probably very personal and in a certain sense of minor importance; the General Synod should if possible be spared that which would be a tax upon its time and not conducive to its dignity or to its freedom in dealing with major denominational affairs. Moreover, such case would have had chance for first and second appeal, a case starting in classis having only equal opportunity in its possible going on to General Synod. The way is open, however, for exceptions. The case from consistory may be of such sort and of such importance, grave rights and precedents being at issue, that many or all the delegates in the Particular Synod feel that a deliverance by General Synod should be secured. This judgment and desire prevail when declared by a member from each classis in the Particular Synod save the classis appealed from. The declaration that it is a case properly to pass to General Synod must be directed to the president of the Particular Synod; it must be within ten days of the synod's adjournment; and it must be in writing. It is not stated whether the declaration is to be a united writing or may be by way of individual letters. Either way of address is apparently admissible, though the single communication signed by all is the more formal and probably preferable way. When consistory is here mentioned, it must be understood as meaning elders also, a case starting with them, as well as a case starting with the whole body.

The General Synod in its functioning as a judicatory has a preliminary procedure, a preliminary representing of itself in way not constitutionally provided for the lower judicatory. It has a Committee on Judicial Business to give initial and, indeed, tentatively complete attention to a case reaching the General Synod by way of appeal or of complaint. In orderly routine an appeal, or a complaint which is a different thing, reaches with its related documents the stated clerk of the General Synod. Instead of holding the papers, as he holds virtually all other communications for presenting to the synod when it convenes, he transmits them to the committee for its precedent study. The committee is

permanent, is continuous from year to year, is not of wholly new membership each year; naturally then its members may or may not be members of the General Synod. The General Synod appoints them, three ministers and two elders. The two elders very generally and appropriately but not at all necessarily are members of the legal profession, lawyers of high standing. The term of office is five years, the term of one member of the committee expiring each year. In case of vacancy arising from any cause, the committee's membership is not to remain incomplete; the vacancy is to be filled at the next stated session of the General Synod. The chairman is chosen by the committee itself.

166. Notice of intention to appeal from an act or decision of a judicatory must be given to the president of that body at the time of the action from which an appeal is taken or within ten days thereof. The appellant must send to the president his appeal in writing with the reasons therefor within ten days after such notice. In default of this procedure, the appeal falls.

167. An appeal made by a judicatory must be made by it regularly convened as such. The appeal with the reasons therefor must be sent in writing to the president of the body from which an appeal is taken, within twenty days of the action from which the appeal is made. In default of this procedure, the appeal falls.

168. Every judicatory which has tried a case originally or by appeal should record its decision stating at length the reasons therefor, in order that the record may exhibit so far as practicable everything which had an influence on its judgment.

169. Individuals who have voted in a lower judicatory upon a case which is appealed or who have prepared and conducted such case shall not be at liberty to vote in the higher judicatory upon the trial of the appeal.

170. A lower judicatory shall be permitted to send a commissioner to the one to which an appeal is made for the purpose of making explanations relative to the case. The original parties in the case shall have the right to be heard in every stage of the trial.

In undertaking an appeal there are two initial communications, it will be seen, notice of intention to appeal and the appeal itself. The first is necessary at once when the action to be appealed from is taken or within ten days thereafter. The second, the appeal itself, is necessary within ten days after the notice has been given. The appeal must be accom-



panied by the reasons upon which it rests. It must be sent in writing. It is not stated that the first notice must be in writing. If given by spoken word it might be valid if unmistakably proved; the writing of it is virtually imperative, more surely guarding against misunderstanding or later dispute about it. Both the notice and the appeal itself must be sent, it will be especially noted, to the president of the body appealed from, not to the president of the body appealed to, must be sent to the president of the body, not to the stated clerk. While a judicatory might overlook some inadvertence, some technical shortcoming, it cannot be too strongly emphasized that exact attention to every item of requirement is of utmost importance, that if there be any fault in required procedure the appeal may be regarded as having lost all right to be considered.

In the case of appeal by a judicatory, no mention is made of necessary prior notice of it; it is to be assumed that such appeal is not referred to at all in section 166. A full twenty days from time of action, equal to the ten and ten more of appeal by a person, are allowed for the sending of the appeal—as in the other case with reasons to the president of the body appealed from. It is emphatic that the appeal must be the action of a meeting regularly convened, must be an act without any informality or technical irregularity.

As already provided in other section, a judicatory must make full record of its decision in any judicial case with reasons and with all considerations which were regarded of weight. Of the first importance is the clear and definite phrasing of a decision in formal way so that what is meant to be said is said, is adequate, and is open to no misunderstanding. Strangely enough there is sometimes failure to render decision in exact and complete form, failure to give it an exact and absolutely clear recording—even in important cases.

In higher judicatory concerned with an appeal no one of course can vote who was concerned with the case, its presenting, or its deciding, in the lower judicatory.

The commissioner whom a lower judicatory may send to

a higher at the passing up of a case on appeal is not, it will be understood, a counsel or a representative of original party in the case. His office is to make any helpful explanations made possible by his familiarity with the trial of the case in the lower judicatory. The appointing of such a commissioner is in fairness to the lower body and a service to the higher body in its desire for all possible light on the case in hand. It must be insistently borne in mind that intermediate judicatories are never themselves the parties in a case. The original parties remain the parties in the case to the end. There is danger of losing sight of this, of a judicatory whose decision is appealed from emerging as a party to defend itself. This means confusion and irregularity. The original parties must be clearly defined throughout; and they have right to be heard at every stage of the case.

171. A certified copy of the action from which an appeal is made shall be transmitted to the judicatory to which the appeal is addressed. Such copy signed by the president and the clerk together with the appeal and the reasons accompanying the same shall be the documents in the case and shall be transmitted to the next regular meeting of the higher judicatory or to the Committee on Judicial Business in case the appeal is made to the General Synod.

172. The appellant may give notice with satisfactory reasons to the judicatory to which an appeal is made that he cannot attend the next stated meeting of that body. His appeal may in this case lie over to the next following stated meeting; but if he fails to appear and to prosecute his appeal without giving such notice and reasons the appeal falls.

173. Either party in appeal proceedings, who may consider himself aggrieved by any decision upon any incidental question which may arise before the final sentence is pronounced, may state his objection to such decision and have the same noted in the minutes of the proceedings to the end that he may avail himself of an appeal from the final sentence without arresting the progress of such investigation or trial. Every decision to which objection is made and the objections themselves shall be distinctly stated in the minutes of the judicatory and sent up with the appeal to the appellate judicatory for review.

It having been made clear that an appeal is to be sent to the president of the judicatory appealed from, direction is

now given for its reaching the judicatory which is appealed to. The president to whom it has been sent and the clerk associated with him, providing themselves with a copy of the action of their judicatory from which the appeal is taken, sign it, both of them; and they transmit this certified copy to the higher judicatory. With this copy of the reported action go the appeal and the reasons for it which have come into the hands of the president from the party making the appeal; these together form the documents in the case; there must be no evidence added; if new evidence demand attention, there must be a remanding of the case to the lower court. The transmitting to the judicatory is naturally the transmitting to the stated clerk of it. The transmitting to the next regular meeting of the judicatory is naturally by the stated clerk who has received the documents from the president and clerk of the lower judicatory. In the case of the General Synod, as noted also in earlier section, the transmitting by the stated clerk is not to the next regular session but at once to the Committee on Judicial Business.

The personal presence of party making appeal is essential to the consideration of it, the trial of the case. The next regular meeting being the set time, if he cannot attend and gives notice with satisfactory reasons, there may be postponement to the next following stated meeting. The case is not to be taken up at a special meeting. If he is absent without notice and without giving reasons, not prosecuting the appeal in person, the appeal is dismissed without consideration. If after explained absence from the first appointment he is absent from the second appointed meeting the appeal is not then prosecuted and it appears to have no further standing. There is no mention of its consideration, of possible trial of the case, after the second failure to appear, even if that failure be with notice and explanation.

The provision for stating objections to any subordinate decisions in the course of a trial, without attending argument, for their careful reporting with decisions and transmitting to the higher judicatory if appeal be prosecuted, is

very wise as preserving the constant and orderly progress of the trial while at the same time conserving the rights and the contentions of the party making objection.

174. Any member of the church, or any minority or any member of such minority in a lower church judicatory, who shall consider any act or judicial decision or any part of the formal proceedings thereof to have been so erroneous as to affect injuriously the interests of truth, godliness, or the Kingdom of God, may present a complaint against such act or decision to the next higher judicatory for examination and decision. Such complaint, if entertained, brings the whole record of the case under the review of the higher judicatory. No such complaint shall be entertained except after notice and the filing of the complaint with the reasons therefor with the president of the body complained of as in cases of appeal.

A complaint is entirely different from an appeal. An appeal is an address to higher judicatory by a party directly ruled against by decision of the lower judicatory who asks judicial review of the case. A complaint is an address to the higher judicatory by one not directly dealt with by act or judicial decision of lower judicatory but who on general grounds of justice and regularity feels that a certain procedure of the lower body has been incorrect and injurious. The error may be thought of as in the decision itself or in the procedure which led up to it. Such disagreement with process or resulting action is naturally found in the minority of the membership which has been active in the matter. This minority may then unite in a complaint; or any member of the minority alone may present a complaint. More than this, any member of the church, even if not a member of the judicatory, who has been watching the matter and is for any reason interested and considers the proceedings at fault and likely to do harm, may present his objection in the formal way of a complaint. The possible occasion for such thing is by no means rare. The privilege given is a very important one. Encouragement is not to be given for frequent or insignificant complaining against official procedure and pronouncement. A majority is presumptively right; when regarded by some or one as substantially or technically wrong the matter may not be of importance enough

to deserve the attention of the higher body; even if apparently important it is not surely necessary or wise to give it such formal attention. On the other hand a consistory or a classis may do something which the higher body really ought to know about in a formal way, the dissent from which ought to be known to them. A consistory or a classis may very easily fall into the habit of doing something in a way contrary to the requirements of the constitution, may persist in doing this in spite, perhaps, of the objections made clear by a minority. It may be plain duty, for the dignity and welfare of the church, for the cause of good order in the church, for some one or more than one to make the situation known to the higher body—by way of complaint. There must be a conviction that the act, the decision or a part of the procedure, has been “so erroneous as to affect injuriously the interests of truth, godliness, or the Kingdom of God.” The complaint must be by way of formalities the same as those required for an appeal, the notice, the complaint itself with reasons, the address to the president of the lower body within the specified periods. The effect of the complaint presented in orderly way and given formal recognition is to bring the whole record with which it is concerned under review. The higher judicatory will examine the proceedings, not by way of formal trial, and will render its judgment, approving or disapproving.

The words, if entertained, suggest that the higher body may for reasons satisfactory to itself refuse to receive the complaint brought to its attention. It may refuse if there be any technical irregularity; it may refuse perhaps if, with technical regularity, there be prejudices or conditions related which make it readily appear unwise and unnecessary to enter into a review of the record; the rejection of a complaint for such discretionary reason should be on very clear and sure ground.

The word, case, may suggest a judicial case, a trial; this is not the definite or exclusive meaning.

A complaint against a Particular Synod addressed to the



General Synod goes to the Committee on Judicial Business in the same way as an appeal.

This section, 174, relates itself closely to section 54.

175. It shall be the duty of the Stated Clerk of the General Synod, on receiving notice of an appeal or complaint addressed to that body, to notify immediately the permanent Committee on Judicial Business of such appeal or complaint, to call a meeting of the committee at a suitable time and place, and to send notice of such meeting to all the parties concerned in the case.

176. It shall be the duty of the permanent Committee on Judicial Business first to inquire whether the appeal or complaint is in regular form and whether all constitutional steps have been taken. If the proceedings in the case are found not to have been in accordance with the provisions of the Constitution, the committee shall at once so report.

177. All appeals and complaints which are found to be regular in form shall be further examined by the committee as to the points at issue. The committee shall inquire into the reasons for the appeal or complaint, shall examine all the documents in the case, shall hear the original parties with such counsel, if desired, other than professional counsel, as the committee may approve and also the commissioner of the judicatory from whose action the appeal is taken. The committee shall then report their finding to the General Synod together with their recommendations.

178. When the report of the committee is presented to the General Synod and before action is taken thereon the original parties in the case with their counsel, if desired, the commissioner of the lower judicatory, and the representatives of the committee may be heard by the Synod. The report of the committee may be adopted, rejected, amended or referred back to the committee, and the decision of the Synod may be either to confirm, or to reverse in whole or in part the judgment of the lower judicatory, or to recommit the case to it either with instructions or to receive a new trial.

The functions and procedure of the Committee on Judicial Business are clearly defined. The creating of this committee has been for the purpose of saving as far as possible the General Synod itself in full session from the engrossing of its time by the details of a case and from the sometimes disturbing effects of such details. There have been occasions when the trial of a case on appeal by the General Synod has been most uncomfortable and with great loss to the efficiency of the body in its one session a year—and with no major interest at issue.

The initial responsibility is upon the stated clerk of the General Synod. He receives the appeal or complaint addressed to the synod, notifies the committee, and himself calls a meeting of it, sending notice to each member of it and to every party concerned in the case. He does not wait for any instruction from the president of the synod and he does not leave the call of meeting to the chairman of the committee. Naturally he will consult the convenience of the members of the committee, ascertaining a time and place agreeable to them all. Also it may be that an informal meeting of the committee might be held prior to the formal meeting, an informal conference when the situation could become somewhat familiar, preparatory to the formal meeting of which all the parties must be notified.

The first duty of the committee formally in session, the documents being before them and the parties present or not present, is to determine whether the appeal or complaint is in proper form, whether the requirements of the constitution bearing upon it have been observed. There is no small possibility that some error will be at once apparent or that one of the parties will make clear that there has been some technical omission in the steps appropriate to the appeal or complaint. The committee, deciding that the case is not in regular form for the synod's consideration, so reports when the synod has convened and the matter is not given further consideration.

If the matter is found in order, the committee proceeds to a study of the case, examines the documents, enters into the grounds for the appeal or complaint, hears the original parties with any allowed counsel, also the commissioner from the lower judicatory. The committee comes to a decision and reports this to the General Synod with any attaching recommendation. It has been in effect a trial of the case and a decision on it although it does not technically take that form.

The General Synod then has this report before it for action. It assumes that the committee's work has been carefully and accurately and completely done. The decision, however, must be that of the General Synod itself. The synod must be intelligent about it and it must be perfectly fair as well as

sincere. Before the synod votes on the report the original parties, counsel perhaps, commissioner, and representatives of the committee shall be heard. Several alternatives are possible. The synod may, as it generally would, adopt the report; it may adopt it with amendment; it may reject it; it may refer the whole question back to the committee for further examination and a new report. In deciding upon the case, following the recommendation of the committee or not following it, the synod does any one of several things; it confirms what the lower judicatory has done; or it reverses in whole or in part what it has done; or it sends the case back to the lower judicatory with instructions to take some modified or supplemental action; or it sends it back for a new trial in view of some irregularity or incompleteness in the original procedure. In sending back with instructions, there may be difference of opinion as to the right of a higher judicatory to change the penalty when it does not reverse the conviction or send back for new trial; such action might fall under the words, reverse in part.

## ARTICLE XIV

### OF RULES AND AMENDMENTS

SECTION 180. The General Synod shall have power to make all such rules and regulations as may be necessary to carry the foregoing articles into effect.

181. Amendments to this Constitution shall be made only upon a recommendation to the Classes by the General Synod at a stated meeting and by the subsequent approval by two-thirds of the Classes of such proposed amendment. When such approval has been given the General Synod may in its discretion pass a final declarative resolution and when such declarative action has been taken, the articles thus determined and declared shall become authoritative parts of the Constitution of the Reformed Church in America.

182. The Rules of Order of the General Synod may be amended at any stated meeting of the Synod by vote of a majority of all the members present, provided due notice of the proposed amendment has been submitted in writing at a previous stated meeting and has received at that previous meeting the approval of a majority. Such amendment to the Rules of Order shall go into effect on the announcement by the President of Synod of favorable action under this provision.

The General Synod has from time to time established one rule or another or a series of rules for the direction of the churches and officers and judicatories in their conduct of affairs under the constitution. A body of them has been in the past assembled and properly printed in connection with the constitution. There are many such items not thus included, found only in the minutes of the General Synod, not a few of them quite lost sight of. It is desirable that all rules for the orderly working of the church's official arrangements should be fully in a code, carefully kept up to date and in form and circulation for ready reference. Such rules may be changed or wholly annulled at any meeting of the General Synod as well as made at any meeting.

The formal rules of order of the General Synod established at any time may be amended only in a somewhat more formal way. Notice of proposed amendment must be given at a previous meeting and the amendment must have been approved by a majority of the synod. It is not yet enacted. It comes up in due order at the next session. If approved by a majority also at this second stated session, the amendment has been passed. The president makes announcement of its adoption and it is at once in effect. The announcement appears as a necessary part of the procedure; an omitting of it is not to be thought of as possible even though the president might be personally and officially opposed to the action.

The amending of the constitution is by a process of many steps, every one of which must be carefully observed. The proposal of amendment may come from any one of several sources, from a member of the General Synod or from a classis or from any member or body in the church disposed to communicate the proposal to the synod. Coming to the attention of the synod by word of member on the floor or by communication from some source or by report of a committee, it is considered, discussed, passed upon by the synod. The vote upon it is essentially an approval or a disapproval of it; the question put to vote, however, is whether it shall be recommended to the classes for their favorable action. If the vote, a majority, is adverse the proposal goes no further. If the vote, a majority, is favorable, the proposed amendment goes down to the classes for their consideration and judgment. It will be noted that the vote of the General Synod is not a vote referring the proposal to the classes for decision; it is a vote recommending the amendment for their approval. This vote must be taken at a stated, that is regular not special, session.

Each classis of the church then, receiving the recommendation communicated by the stated clerk of the General Synod, gives to the proposed amendment its consideration and judgment. A majority vote is the expression of its judgment for or against. The vote of each classis is communicated by its stated clerk to the stated clerk of the General



Synod. The next stated session of the synod receives these reports of the action of the classes; they are counted, the classes for and the classes against the proposed amendment. If less than two-thirds of the classes are in favor of the amendment, it is defeated and has no further standing. If two-thirds of the classes have voted in favor, the amendment is potentially passed. It is not yet in effect and it may yet fail. It goes into effect, becomes a part of the constitution, only after a declarative vote of the General Synod. This declarative vote as provided for in the constitution, 1874, was open to question whether it was not purely *pro forma* and never to be omitted. The question is not an open one under the present words of the constitution. The words are clear, establishing now at least the option of the General Synod at this point; "may in its discretion pass a final declarative resolution." If the synod does not pass the resolution, the amendment does not go into effect; it fails to become a part of the constitution in spite of the apparently decisive votes in favor of it; it has no further standing; any effort in the same behalf later on must make a new beginning and go through the same procedure. If the General Synod passes the declarative resolution as it ordinarily would, the amendment is at once in effect, a part of the constitution. It will be seen that an amendment thus must have the three endorsements, first by a majority of the General Synod, second by two-thirds of the classes, third by a majority of the General Synod in session again. The virtual right of veto vested in the second session of the synod may not seem to every one excellent procedure. It does justify itself. The synod changing its personnel every year, the votes of two sessions are doubly representative of the church at large. Moreover, it may happen that new light on the question has come in the time between the voting of the classes and the session of the synod, changing the apparent expediency of the proposed action in the minds of the representatives of the classes in the synod.

- 1791 - Pract<sup>l</sup> int<sup>l</sup> of Holland  
1792 - Amer. slaves  
1788 - State of govt trans'd  
1792 - it const<sup>n</sup> adopted (Dort's arts.  
of govt in expl<sup>n</sup> arts.)  
1792 - Gen. Lya. org'd.











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*To be inserted in  
Dr. W. H. S. Demarest's  
Notes on the Constitution*

## AMENDMENTS, 1930-1939

### THE CONSTITUTION OF THE REFORMED CHURCH IN AMERICA

1930. Section 44. Read: The elders and deacons shall be chosen to serve for two or three years at the option of the church except in cases where there is a vacancy to be filled, occasioned by death or other cause. The person or persons chosen in such cases shall serve for the unexpired term only.

Section 46. Read: One half or one third of the whole number of both elders and deacons shall be elected annually in order to avoid an entire change of the Consistory at one time. The same method of electing one half or one third of the whole number shall be pursued in enlarging Consistories, as far as relates to the additional members. The first elders and deacons of new churches shall at the first meeting of the Consistory after their installation determine by lot who of their number shall serve for one year and who shall serve for two years and who shall serve for three years. Elders and deacons may be re-elected but shall not be reordained and need be reinstalled only when two terms of service are not consecutive.

1932. Section 77. Read: Membership in the church may be terminated only by death, or by dismission to another church, or when a member has united with another church without permission, or by a procedure of discipline, or as otherwise indicated herein. A member who has ceased his relationship with the church for a period of two years or whose address for such period has been unknown in spite of the efforts of the minister and elders to obtain it, and who has not communicated with the church or contributed to its support or its benevolences, should be placed on an inactive list. If after the expiration of an additional two years the address of such person is still unknown, or in response to further admonition he gives no evidence of willingness to renew his active connection with the church, by vote of the minister and elders, his name may then be removed from the roll of membership and due effort shall be made to acquaint him with

such action. The ministers and elders are charged to impress upon members of the church who remove from the bounds of one church to those of another the duty of obtaining from Consistory a certificate of their membership and of dismissal.

1938. Section 145, second paragraph. Read: A minister or other officer who has been suspended or deposed from office may be restored to his office on profession of penitence and on renewal of his vows before the judicatory by which he has been suspended or deposed, provided that the judicatory is satisfied that the honor of the office will not be impaired and that the welfare of the church will be served by such restoration and provided that a two-thirds vote of the judicatory approves it. Restoration after deposition must include reordination to office.

1939. Section 6. Read: The Ecclesiastical Assemblies and Judicatories in the Church are four:

1. The Consistory (Assembly).  
The Elders (Judicatory).
2. The Classis.
3. The Particular Synod.
4. The General Synod.

Section 8, second paragraph. Read: The name of a person thus demitting the ministry shall be removed from the roll of Classis. If the demitter should desire to return to the office of a minister, he must be re-ordained, the ordination to be conducted by the Classis of which he was a member at the time he demitted the ministry, after such examination as the Classis may deem necessary.

Section 19. Insert "in regular or special session," after "shall be conducted by the Classis."

Section 21. Substitute "The minister shall be amenable solely to the Classis of which he is a member," for the words, "The minister as an officer in the church is a member of his Classis and amenable solely thereto."

Section 22. Substitute "The Consistory of a church without a pastor," for "Consistories of vacant congregations."

Section 26. Substitute "church" for "congregation," two places.

Section 41. Add: "Also to give particular attention and care to all the benevolences of the church and to be assistant to the congregation at services of public worship." (As now in Liturgy).

Section 42. Add: "No person shall be allowed to exercise the office of elder or deacon who has not been ordained to the

office according to the Word of God and the order established by the Church."

- Section 43. Insert "Ordination and," before the word, "installation."
- Section 50. In second paragraph add, "The judicatory of Elders shall be those in term of active office together with the regularly installed minister or ministers." In last paragraph add "whether or not in term of active service."
- Section 60. Substitute "the calling of a minister or the dissolving of pastoral relations," for the words, "the calling or dismissal of a minister."
- Section 61. Change first sentence to read, "The minister shall be president of the Consistory and shall preside at all its meetings except as elsewhere provided."
- Section 62. Insert "and are serving it," after the words, "who have served it."
- Section 63. Substitute "church" for "congregation." Add at the end "and congregation."
- Section 67. Substitute "church" for "congregation."
- Section 71. Substitute "church" for "congregation."
- Section 75. Strike out "and in choosing delegates to attend the classes."
- Section 98. Substitute "church," for "congregation."
- Section 140. Substitute "the Elders," for "the Consistory," two places.
- Section 141. Substitute "the Elders," for "the Consistory," two places.
- Section 144. Substitute "church" for "congregation."
- Section 162. At end of first sentence, add: "or assembly." In second sentence read: "The same right belongs also to the Elders or to a Consistory, or to a Classis."
- Section 163. Read: "which have originated with the Elders or in a Consistory," except, etc.



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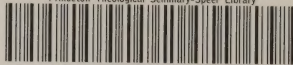
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